

Australia: Socialist Equality Party meeting attendees support party's anti-war program

Our reporters
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World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke with workers and young people attending the Socialist Equality Party's election meetings last week in Melbourne and Sydney.

Alexis, a nursing student at Victoria University, was enthusiastic about the SEP's election campaign and last Sunday's public meeting in Broadmeadows.

"I really enjoyed the meeting," he said. "It was fantastic to hear what a socialist program looks like. I've been following similar ideals for a long time but it's always encouraging to see people put into words the thoughts and feelings that I've had for a while now. I'm still learning about the SEP but want to learn more.

"My family comes from Chile. Famously there was a coup, and my father was a prisoner of war so conversations around fascism have always been present in my upbringing. Trump is a fascist. To see him elected again has me very worried about the state of the world, especially with other things going on in the background like climate change and the cost of living. I can see the future is very dark if things don't change. It's important for workers to push back against even the inkling of fascism," Alexis continued.

"What Trump is doing—the isolationist policies, discrimination against minorities and immigrants, persecution of the LGBT community and to see corporations falling in line and the shutting down of social programs—is frightening.

"We are already in a state of war, a trade war, and so I'm worried about the escalation of a live war between the US and China and what that would look like. There's been a big push by the Australian government for military recruitment over the last ten years, in particular. Politicians are talking about increasing spending on defence, as in the AUKUS deal. It really does feel like governments around the world are

gearing up for war.

"It's interesting to see [Prime Minister Anthony] Albanese, with his student politics history of being pro-Palestine, now backflipping and increasing military spending and legitimising Netanyahu and his policies. But I'm not surprised that Labor is supporting and involved in the war machine," Alexis said.

Amin, a doctor whose family comes from various countries in the Middle East, said the SEP meeting covered a lot of ground.

"It was very good to hear the candidates give a recap of the current priorities facing all of society and the international working class. There was a good discussion on how we can form rank-and-file committees in various workplaces and help workers take the lead in struggles against the assault on their working conditions.

"Whatever is being offered on the surface by the major parties in this election doesn't deal with the deeper issues. They're not talking about the fact that most of the US-aligned capitalist nations are being driven towards prioritising military spending and gearing their nations towards conflict with other spheres of rising nations, especially China. This military spending diverts resources away from socially beneficial ends," he stated.

Amin said the Israeli government's ongoing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza "is one of many conflicts in the world today that are the product of historic tendencies by the imperialist nations," but workers and young people are not told about this history. "For the time being, those in power are trying to control how we think and what we have access to in the media," he said.

"Capitalism suppresses the opportunity for people to develop objective class consciousness, and it does this

by using identity politics to create artificial divisions within the working class. That is why meetings like this are important,” he said.

Amin, who has attended some meetings of the Health Workers Rank and File Committee, which was initiated by the SEP, referred to the developing crisis in public health in Australia: “A commonly faced challenge in healthcare now is the amount of surplus labour being sought from nurses, particularly with ratios and safe working conditions. My doctor colleagues in New South Wales have been in a dispute over wages.

“There are lots of wider issues one could discuss about health care in general, but the main problem is that under capitalism it’s about private corporations and governments extracting profit.”

In Sydney, retired merchant seaman **Andre** was attending his first SEP meeting. “I come from a Labor background, going back to both my parents. But they’ve gone too far to the right. On industrial relations, Labor has continually gone backwards, making it harder and harder for workers. I believe in reward for effort and enterprise, but I don’t like the kind of dog-eat-dog capitalism that we have now, which is why I’m swinging more towards socialism.

“I was a union delegate when I was working. I’m for the workers’ movement. But it’s frustrating. There’s been a whole push of divide and conquer. There are good people but there are also issues of imposters and careerists in the unions and Labor, who are there for their own interests.”

Andre spoke on the destructive impact of enterprise bargaining, introduced in the 1990s by the Keating Labor government with the support of the union officialdom. It divides workers, by allowing for separate workplace agreements at individual facilities and factories.

“I never liked that. You can see how different it was with our parents and grandparents where there were nationwide agreements covering entire industries and they could fight together for their interests. A lot changed in the early 80s, at the time of Thatcher and Reagan. Here Labor sold us out a lot. The line was that we are ‘all in this together,’ employers and workers, which was never true.”

Asked about the issue of war, Andre said: “You have to be thick, not to see the con that’s happening when you speak up about Gaza. Anyone who does is called

an antisemite. How ridiculous! It’s an insult to intelligence. They try to say that when you’re against Zionism, you’re against Jews, when they are two different things.

“It’s hideous what’s going on over there, these poor women and kids. The US, Britain and Australia are all supporting it.”

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