

The significance of the Socialist Equality Party's vote and campaign in the Australian election

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With the count largely complete for the May 3 Australian federal election, the total vote for the candidates who stood for the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is 15,988 first-preference votes in the Senate and 2,805 in the three House of Representatives seats that the party contested.

The breakdown is 11,960 votes for the Senate in New South Wales (NSW) and 4,028 in Victoria. In the lower house seat of Oxley, a working-class electorate in Brisbane, the SEP received 1,435 votes; in Newcastle, the regional NSW city associated with steel production, 883, and in Calwell, covering working-class suburbs of northwest Melbourne, 487.

The votes are a small but significant indication of growing support for the revolutionary, socialist perspective advanced by the SEP. The total number of ballots cast for the party is the highest in the past decade.

Even more than in previous elections, the votes for SEP candidates were conscious and deliberate.

The party's name did not appear on the ballot alongside the names of its candidates, as a result of political censorship by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC). Despite the SEP having submitted a list of members in excess of the stipulated 1,500 and having met the intrusive and onerous requirements placed before minor parties, the AEC rejected its application for official registration on spurious and opaque grounds.

The censorship of the SEP was one component of a desperate attempt to shore-up the two-party system, amid a deep-going crisis that was evident in the lead-up to the election. For months, polling had indicated that neither Labor nor the Liberal-National Coalition would be able to form a majority government.

There was widespread hostility to the incumbent Labor administration, because of its imposition of the biggest reversal to working-class living standards in decades, as well as its diversion of vast resources to the military in preparation for war and its support for the Israeli genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. The Coalition was still afflicted by its 2022 election defeat, its worst in decades.

The major parties responded with an election campaign based on lies and banalities. Amid the cost-of-living crisis, they

haggled over minuscule tax cuts and reductions to the fuel excise, which nobody believed would substantially improve the lot of ordinary people. Above all, the official campaign was based on the lie that Australia would be buttressed against the effects of the enormous global shocks and upheavals that are underway.

In opposition to this fraudulent nationalist exceptionalism, promoted by the media, Labor, the Coalition and every other party, the SEP insisted that the situation in Australia would be determined by the massive crisis of the global capitalist system.

Our candidates explained that the ascension of the fascistic administration of US President Donald Trump marked a turning point in world history. Trump's attempts to erect a dictatorship in America, his turn to global economic war and to naked militarism, were not a US phenomenon, the SEP stated. They were the sharpest expression of the program of the ruling elite everywhere.

The SEP refuted the claims that Australia could escape the consequences of the tariff war initiated by Trump. With the economy already in a slump, Australia was heavily dependent on trade with China, on the one hand, and US foreign direct investment and financial flows on the other. What was in store was not the "better future" falsely promised by the major parties, but economic crisis and austerity.

And, in opposition to every other party, the SEP sounded the alarm over the growing danger of world war. It was the only party to centrally raise Australia's integration into the advanced US-led plans for war with China. The outgoing Labor government had completed Australia's transformation into a frontline state for such a disastrous war, including through the largest military build-up since World War II and a vast expansion of US basing arrangements.

The SEP placed the Gaza genocide within that context of an eruption of imperialist militarism globally. In opposition to the protest politics peddled by the Greens and pseudo-left groups, which have transformed mass hostility into impotent appeals to the very Labor government complicit in the historic war crimes, the SEP insisted that an end to the genocide required the independent mobilisation of the working class against

imperialist war and capitalism.

Similarly, the SEP campaigned for the establishment of workplace and neighbourhood rank-and-file committees, as the only means for the working class to develop a political and industrial struggle against the assault on jobs, wages and working conditions enforced by Labor and the corporatised trade unions, as well as the onslaught on social spending, from the decimation of public education and healthcare to the destruction of public housing.

The result of the election confirmed the party's stress on the primacy of global developments. Against predictions, Labor was returned to majority government. But contrary to its claims and those of the media, this was not the result of a masterful Labor campaign. Instead, masses of people repudiated the Coalition, because it was associated with Trump and his fascist agenda.

Notwithstanding the return of a Labor government, the election underscored the deepening crisis of the entire capitalist political establishment. The Liberals have been decimated, and the Coalition is in meltdown. But Labor received only 34.8 percent of the primary vote, less than 2 percent above its 2022 result, which was its lowest since the 1930s. After decades of enforcing the dictates of the banks and the corporations, Labor no longer has any stable mass base in the working class.

The election was again marked by a growth of support for third parties and independents, with their share of the vote at 33 percent the highest in history. For the first time, third party ballots exceeded those of one of the major parties, the Coalition.

Within that broader trend, there was a clear growth in anti-capitalist sentiment. In addition to the votes for the SEP, nationwide in the Senate, more than 116,000 votes were cast for parties with "socialist" in their name—nearly double the 60,515 recorded in 2022 and more than five times the 22,420 in 2019. That underscores a growing constituency among workers and young people for a socialist alternative to capitalism.

Those parties, however, represent no such alternative, instead comprising a pseudo-left tied to Labor, the Greens and the union bureaucracy. The majority of those votes, over 60,000, went to the Victorian Socialists (VS). Unlike the SEP, which was subjected to a media blackout, it received substantial coverage in the official press.

That was largely because VS selected Jordan van den Lamb as its lead candidate. A minor social media celebrity, who has cultivated a large online audience by criticising elements of the housing crisis, van den Lamb has no record in the socialist movement, with his politics largely indistinguishable from the Greens, a pro-capitalist outfit. He summed up, in particularly crude form, VS' promotion of national reformism, stating for instance that socialism means "increasing democracy," which "you can kind of do in stages under capitalism itself."

Socialist Alliance, the other pseudo-left party, similarly focussed its campaign on calls for the election of Labor as a

"lesser-evil," and a promotion of the Greens, even as that party was campaigning for a pro-war and pro-business coalition with Labor. The lurch to the right by the pseudo-left was epitomised by Socialist Alliance's call for the military budget to be halved, signalling its support for at least \$28 billion to be allocated to the war machine every year.

While many workers and youth voted for these parties in the mistaken belief that they represented socialism, a comparison of the NSW Senate vote for Socialist Alliance and the SEP underscores their diametrically opposed class orientations.

The largest share of Socialist Alliance's Senate votes were in the electorates of Sydney and Grayndler. These are inner-city seats, dominated by a relatively affluent middle-class, much of which is preoccupied with issues of individual identity and lifestyle.

By contrast, the SEP's largest Senate vote was in five working-class electorates in southwestern Sydney, Fowler, Watson, Blaxland, McMahon, and Werriwa, accounting for 21 percent of the total. For decades, considered "safe" Labor seats, the SEP found massive opposition in these areas, which have a large immigrant and Middle Eastern population to Labor's support for the Gaza genocide.

But more broadly, there is a sense in the working class that the entire political establishment represents the interests of big business, and that the future, whoever is in government, will be one of war and deepening social hardship.

That will be the case, as Labor is tasked by the ruling elite with responding to the crisis of Australian and world capitalism with sweeping cuts to social spending, as well as an even greater expansion of the military in preparation for war. Oppositional sentiments will deepen, and the Labor-union mechanisms for the suppression of the class struggle will increasingly breakdown, heralding major upheavals of the working class.

As the SEP insisted in its campaign, the critical issue is building a socialist and revolutionary party of the working-class to lead the struggles that lie ahead. We appeal to our readers and supporters to join the SEP today!



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