

Stop Labor's destruction of Melbourne public housing towers!

Socialist Equality Party (Australia)

11 July 2025

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) calls on workers to join with residents to fight the Victorian Labor government's plans to tear down 44 public housing towers in Melbourne and displace some 10,000 people from their homes.

The staggering demolition of 6,600 dwellings, more than 10 percent of Victoria's public housing stock, is the largest destruction of public housing in Australia's history.

In particular, we urge building workers to take a stand in defence of the vulnerable and oppressed occupants, many of them immigrants, refugees, disabled or elderly. A total ban should be established on any work related to the demolition of public housing. A clear line must be drawn: Construction workers will not lift a finger to carry out Labor's profit-driven program to destroy homes and communities.

We also call on Victoria's 380,000 public sector workers to join the struggle against the destruction of public housing, which is just one stark expression of a broader assault on the working class, spearheaded by Labor. Facing record-high levels of debt, the state government has implemented savage austerity measures. Billions of dollars have been slashed from public schools and the public sector has been hit with punitive wage caps and thousands of job cuts.

Time is of the essence. The first five towers are set to be demolished this year. Two have already been emptied, after the Labor government seized on problems with the towers' sewerage as a pretext to drive out the occupants. Around 70 percent of residents of the other three buildings have been relocated, through a campaign of propaganda and intimidation that includes preparatory work for demolition on the still-occupied towers.

Communities established over decades are being dispersed, as residents are hustled off the estates, some to Melbourne's outer reaches, and others to smaller social housing apartments. These can be far from their existing jobs, schools and social connections. The Labor government's transparent purpose is to rid the valuable inner-city real estate of workers and the poor and create new profit opportunities for property developers and their parasitic financiers.

The plan is to construct 20,000 new units in total, of which just 7,260 are "social housing" apartments—an increase of only 660. The rest—some 12,540—will be new private apartments to be sold on the open market.

Many of the thousands of residents currently living in the towers were initially promised the right of return when the new apartments are built. However, Homes Victoria has surreptitiously changed the wording, making this guarantee conditional on "the suitability of new homes." Even if they are able to return to the new "social housing" apartments, rent caps will increase from 25 to 30 percent of income, utility costs will be higher and tenure less secure. Residents will be

considerably worse off.

While far advanced, Labor's devastating plans can and must be defeated.

We urge residents of all 44 towers to build rank-and-file neighbourhood committees, to democratically discuss, link up and plan the fight to defend your homes and stop the attack on public housing as a whole. The SEP pledges to provide every political assistance, and has already helped residents of several towers to establish the Neighbourhood Action Committee (NAC).

Protests alone will not stop the wrecking operation, which is driven by powerful and well-funded backers. An even more powerful force, the working class, must be mobilised to halt the demolition, including through industrial action and strikes.

Such a mobilisation is impossible within the framework of the trade unions, whose role as an arm of the capitalist state is to suppress the struggles of workers. Instead, workers will have to establish rank-and-file committees on every job site and in every workplace, to coordinate a unified struggle with residents, against Labor's attack on public housing.

The Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU) postures as a defender of public housing, including in its submission to an ongoing parliamentary inquiry into the Melbourne tower project.

The submission makes a vague plea for the government to "prioritise public welfare over short-term economic gains." But it accepts the razing of the towers as a foregone conclusion, asking the government to ensure that the "social isolation and mental health impacts" of destroying more than 6,000 homes are "mitigated."

What the CFMEU leadership will categorically not do is mobilise its 80,000 members to halt the destruction in the first place. For decades, the union has functioned as the close supporter and integral component of successive Labor governments as they have run down and slashed public housing stock as part of their broader pro-business agenda.

Moreover, the CFMEU is now effectively under direct state control. Last year, the construction division of the CFMEU was placed under quasi-dictatorial administration by the federal Labor government to facilitate the slashing of wages and conditions in the building industry. This will doubtless be used by the bureaucracy and its apologists as an excuse for the union's refusal to actively defend the 44 towers.

Whatever token words of opposition they mouth to the destruction of public housing, the CFMEU leaders—under administration or otherwise—along with those of the other building industry unions, will oversee the demolition, just as they have overseen the attacks on real wages, conditions, safety and job security for decades.

To stop the destruction of public housing, workers will have to take matters into their own hands. Through rank-and-file committees, building workers can fight for a sector-wide ban on demolition work at the towers, as well as broader actions against those companies involved in the destructive operation, and the Labor government itself.

This could include, for example, a call for strikes and industrial action across the operations of John Holland, the major infrastructure company contracted to demolish the first five towers. A mass strike by public sector workers would bring the state's hospitals, schools and other vital infrastructure to a halt within days.

The SEP proposes as initial demands to be fought for by rank-and-file committees of residents and workers:

- Halt the demolition! Hands off public housing! Invest public funds to upgrade and refurbish all public housing.
- Expropriate vacant investment properties that are being hoarded for profit—make these available to the homeless.
- Cap rents and mortgage repayments to 25 percent of a family's income.
- Allocate billions of dollars for the construction of new high-quality public housing to provide for those currently on waiting lists and everyone in dire need of secure housing.

This perspective is diametrically opposed to what is put forward by all other groups purporting to support the tower residents.

This includes the Greens, who continue to promote illusions that court cases or parliamentary manoeuvres will either stop the demolition, or persuade Labor to carry it out in a more "humane" way. This is aimed at sending public housing residents down a political blind alley, based on the lie that there is no need for a broader mobilisation of workers or a fight against the government.

Labor's plan to bulldoze and privatise vast swathes of public housing is not a case of "botched decision-making," as Victorian Greens MLA Gabrielle de Vietri recently claimed. It is a sharp expression of a broader profit-driven assault on the entire working class, under conditions of a deepening global capitalist crisis. This offensive is backed by all representatives of the ruling class, including, ultimately, the Greens, who serve to confine the opposition within safe parliamentary channels.

Despite their progressive posturing, the Greens are a capitalist party, whose highest aspiration is to serve as a coalition partner in a Labor government. That is why the federal Greens last year backed Labor's pro-business so-called "housing affordability" legislation.

Under the federal measures, billions of dollars will be handed over to developers in a program that will result in fewer than 40,000 new social and "affordable" dwellings over five years, barely 5 percent of the current shortfall.

While governments state and federal declare "there is no more money for housing," defence spending is increasing at a rate not seen for decades. The cost of nuclear-powered submarines, slated at \$368 billion, would pay for housing developments throughout the country to ensure ordinary people have decent, permanent housing. The obliteration of 6,600 public housing apartments in Victoria is part of the attack on social programs including health, education and welfare—all in the interests of prosecuting war.

The national median home price is now over \$1 million and Australian capitals top global lists of the most unaffordable cities. The soaring cost of housing has generated a huge increase in wealth for property developers and financial speculators, while driving working-class families into crippling debt, financial stress and even homelessness. Having engineered this housing crisis for their own

benefit, the ruling class is seeking to plunge the knife in deeper, by tearing down and privatising what little remains of public housing.

In New South Wales, for example, the Labor government has begun evicting the first of 3,000 residents of the Waterloo South public housing estate in Sydney. As with the Melbourne towers, this is transparently aimed at freeing up valuable inner-city real estate for redevelopment.

The attack on public housing being carried out by governments around the world is a stark demonstration of the brutal reality of capitalism. All human needs, including the basic right to a place to live, are subordinated to the interests of big business.

The demolition of the 44 towers and the broader assault on public housing can be stopped, but only through a united counteroffensive of rank-and-file workers and residents. This should be the starting point of building a political movement of the working class against the broader assault on social rights and living standards. It must be independent of Labor, the Greens, the unions, and all other organisations who seek to divert the class struggle behind toothless appeals to big-business governments.

What is posed is the necessity for a political struggle against capitalism itself. The working class must fight to take political power and implement socialist policies, including placing the banks and major building companies under workers' control and ownership. Only in this way can the vast resources created by workers be used to fulfil human need, including for high quality public housing, health care and education, rather than further enrich the wealthy few.

The SEP has called a public meeting, titled "Ban Labor's demolition of Melbourne's public housing towers! Fight for a socialist housing program!" Register today to attend!

WHEN: 3:00 p.m., Sunday 27 July

WHERE: Supper Room, Kensington Town Hall, 30-34 Bellair Street, Kensington VIC 3031

Can't attend in person? Register to join via Zoom.

We urge all public housing residents throughout Australia, and supporters of public housing throughout the working class, to contact the SEP today to discuss this perspective and how you can build a rank-and-file committee in your workplace or neighbourhood.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact