

Residents denounce Labor's demolition of Melbourne towers: “Shame on the government, they are taking advantage of vulnerable people!”

Our reporters

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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) has been campaigning against the Victorian Labor government's plan to demolish 44 public housing towers across Melbourne. The planned destruction will displace some 10,000 people, among the most vulnerable layers of the working class in Australia's second most populous city.

Labor's profit-driven demolitions, which are being carried out on behalf of the property developers and financial parasites, will be the largest destruction of public housing in Australian history. It is part of a sweeping assault against the entire working class and its social and democratic rights. The SEP calls on residents and workers to form rank-and-file committees to organise resistance, independent of the trade unions and the parliamentary parties, to stop this destruction.

SEP campaigners, who recently visited towers in the suburbs of Flemington, Collingwood, Carlton, South Yarra and South Melbourne, have won an enthusiastic response to this perspective.

The SEP is holding a public meeting—"Ban Labor's demolition of Melbourne's public housing towers! Fight for a socialist housing program!"—on July 27 in Melbourne and online to discuss how to take forward this struggle. Register for the meeting [here](#).

Ali, a young construction worker and Flemington towers resident, said: "It is disgraceful to demolish the towers. I've lived here for three years, and it's a good community. People help each other.

"The government wants more money, which is why they want to demolish them and hand the land over to private developers. The towers are closer to the city,

and this area is an example of gentrification, so they will be able to sell new apartment buildings for a lot of money.

"I work in construction and think it's a good idea to turn to building workers, and that they should ban the demolition."

Riyad, another construction worker, said: "Shame on the government for doing this. They're doing it because of profit through the big developers. They say they're bringing in affordable housing, but it is not affordable. It's based on your income, but you can 100 percent be sure it will be too high. They want to put as much housing in the space as they can."

"Shame on the government, they are taking advantage of vulnerable people. We live paycheque to paycheque, we're not multi-millionaires, shame on them. My sister was kicked out of the one that's going to be demolished first."

Riyad also denounced the Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU) bureaucracy for blocking any struggle by building workers to oppose the demolition and defend public housing.

"As for the CFMEU, I don't think they will help," he said. "They haven't taken any action. If you want to do something, the first thing you do is take action. They are powerful, but they don't think they would get any benefit by saving the towers. If they thought they would get benefit from it, they would do it."

"We had demonstrations when the CFMEU was put into administration. All workers' penalties, all our rights are gone."

Rick, a retired teacher, campaigned at the public

housing estates with the SEP and spoke with residents. “To pull these buildings down is a disgrace. Although they are austere, they are a generous space. When they were built, there was a clear idea they should be a dignified place for people,” he said.

“The quality of the construction is very high compared to contemporary buildings. They could be wonderful if refurbished and if the people who live here were treated with respect.”

Rick compared the Victorian Labor government’s demolition plans with the privatisation of the Sirius apartment block in inner-city Sydney. “In a way, Sirius was a blueprint for this demolition. The NSW government claimed there was no structural integrity in the Sirius buildings. They said the site was too valuable to remain as public housing, and that it should be sold to fund new social housing elsewhere. There was a big campaign by the residents to resist.

“The first step to closing it down was shutting down the communal spaces. In 2019, after driving all the residents out, it was sold for \$150 million to private developers who converted it into luxury apartments. They now are being sold for prices ranging from \$1.5 million to \$35 million.”

Daniel, a University of Melbourne student and a member of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, also participated in the SEP’s campaign. “This demolition plan is impacting the most vulnerable part of society,” he explained. “You’ve got refugees, people with disabilities, the elderly—a mixture of people with very precarious living circumstances.

“Now, during the period of demolition, the so-called ‘solutions’ provided to residents by the government are not sufficient. Especially for people that need access to care and support. These services are just not available when they are relocated to areas on the outskirts of the metropolitan area, which have lower infrastructure accessibility to transport, healthcare, even job search facilities. And all this is glossed over with this false promise of having a ‘better future.’

“The towers are located around very desirable real estate and developing that land seems to be the priority for profits and extracting revenue from both the private residences and social housing that will replace the public housing.

“This is an attack on the entire working class. Look at the current housing crisis for example. What’s the most

efficient way to provide housing for a large amount of people? It’s public housing, which means demolishing existing towers during a housing crisis doesn’t resolve the issue but only intensifies it.”

Daniel spoke on the way forward for residents: “It’s important to make clear that the only real alternative for residents is taking up the case themselves and fighting the demolition. Otherwise, they confront more expensive housing, privatised housing, less secure tenure and flexibility. The towers need to be refurbished, and more towers built to address the housing crisis. There should be more public housing, not less.”

Register today for the SEP public meeting: “Ban Labor’s demolition of Melbourne’s public housing towers! Fight for a socialist housing program!”

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

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

Or join online on Zoom.



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