

A socialist perspective to fight against war and austerity! Support the Socialist Equality Party in the Victorian election!

Socialist Equality Party (Australia)
16 October 2026

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is standing candidates in the November 28 Victorian election to provide workers and young people with a socialist and internationalist way forward against war, austerity, authoritarianism and the far right.

Our candidates are 31-year-old Morgan Peach, president of the SEP's youth wing, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, at the University of Melbourne, and Peter Byrne, a member of the Trotskyist movement for more than 40 years. They are standing on an independent ticket for the upper house region of Northern Metropolitan, which encompasses Melbourne's industrial north and its diverse working-class communities.

This is a crisis election. It is taking place amid an already developing third world war, a deepening assault on democratic rights, a worsening cost-of-living disaster and sweeping attacks on the working class. There is mass hostility to Labor, the Coalition is fracturing, and the old parliamentary order is in crisis.

Under these conditions, the election is not a democratic contest, but a conspiracy by the political and media establishment. No other party will tell the truth about the decisive issues confronting workers and young people. Only the SEP explains that whichever party or combination of parties forms government, it will intensify the same militarist and pro-corporate agenda.

The fraud promoted by every other party is that the fundamental problems confronting workers can somehow be resolved within Victoria. The crises confronting workers in this state are expressions of the breakdown of global capitalism. They require the independent political mobilisation of the working class across Australia, as part of a unified international struggle against the profit system which leads to war and social misery.

Stop imperialist war! End AUKUS and the US alliance!

World War III's opening shots have been fired, yet the election campaign is being conducted as if the gravest crisis confronting humanity does not exist. Labor, the Coalition, the Greens and One Nation are silent on the war because they are all pro-war parties.

Federally, the Labor government of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese is spearheading Australia's role in the developing global war, with the Coalition's support. Labor has aligned Australia ever more openly with Washington's drive to offset its historic decline through military violence in the Middle East, against Russia and in the accelerating confrontation with China.

The US-Israeli war on Iran launched on February 28 marked a major turning point. It is an utterly criminal war of aggression involving the assassination of the leadership of a sovereign state and the murder of thousands of civilians, including school children, killed in the first days of the bombardment. It is inseparable from the ongoing Gaza genocide and the broader eruption of imperialist violence throughout the Middle East. Labor was among the first governments internationally to line up behind the assault, underscoring the complicity of Australian imperialism in war crimes expanding into a region-wide conflagration.

Pine Gap and the other joint facilities provide intelligence and targeting data essential to US operations. Labor deployed an Australian Wedgetail command-and-surveillance aircraft, missiles and military personnel to the Middle East. Australian personnel were aboard a US submarine that sank an Iranian vessel off the coast of Sri Lanka.

Imperialist barbarism in the Middle East is tied to the US-NATO proxy war in Ukraine, which is escalating to open warfare against Russia and, above all, the central strategic aim of US imperialism: preparations for war against nuclear-armed China. Under Albanese, Labor is completing Australia's transformation into a launching pad for this catastrophe through the AUKUS military pact, expanded US basing and the conversion of northern Australia into a platform for American bombers, warships and marines.

Labor has lifted annual military expenditure to more than \$60 billion and committed a further \$53 billion over the coming decade. The \$368 billion AUKUS submarine program, long-range missiles and new military infrastructure are preparations for a catastrophic war in the Indo-Pacific.

Every area of the country, including Victoria, is being integrated into the war drive.

The Victorian Labor government's Defence Vision declares the state a "global defence and national security powerhouse." More than 2,500 businesses are tied to the military supply chain, which receives \$10.9 billion in annual Defence expenditure, while major universities are being drawn into military research, artificial intelligence, aerospace and autonomous weapons.

The drive to war abroad is accompanied by an escalating assault on democratic rights at home. In response to mass anti-war sentiment, the federal Labor government has spearheaded an offensive against opposition to the Gaza genocide, supported by state governments including Victorian Labor, which has introduced new restrictions on protests and expanded police powers.

These attacks have implications far beyond the suppression of opposition to the genocide. They are part of the strengthening of the repressive apparatus of the state in preparation for growing opposition to Australia's involvement in an expanding global war and the accompanying assault on workers' living standards.

• **The SEP demands an immediate end to the assault on Iran and the Gaza genocide, an end to the US-NATO war against Russia and the dismantling of all preparations for war against China. Abolish AUKUS, end the US alliance, close the bases and dismantle the national-security apparatus directed against workers and anti-war opposition.**

War is not the product of this or that bad government, nor of mistaken policies that can be corrected through parliamentary pressure. It arises from the capitalist profit system itself. Rival ruling classes compete for markets, resources and cheap labour, using their states and armed forces to secure profits at their rivals' expense. That is why the struggle against war requires the building of an international anti-war movement of the working class fighting for world socialism.

Billions for social need—not the banks, big business and war!

War abroad means class war at home. Vast resources are being diverted into militarism and corporate handouts. At the same time, governments are demanding that workers pay for mounting state debts and the protection of corporate profits through cuts to public education, healthcare, housing and other essential services and wage suppression. Amid the worst cost-of-living crisis in decades, governments insist there is no money to meet the most basic social needs.

This escalating austerity offensive is at the heart of the Victorian election.

Victoria's debt is forecast to rise from \$175.6 billion in 2026–27 to \$199.3 billion by 2029–30, with annual interest payments reaching \$11.8 billion. These payments will build no school, treat no patient and house no family. They will flow to banks and financial institutions simply to service past borrowing.

Over more than two decades of almost uninterrupted rule, Victorian Labor has presided over the breakdown of public healthcare and education, systematically subordinating essential services to the interests of the corporate elite. Its demolition of Melbourne's 44 public-housing towers is a direct assault on some of the most vulnerable sections of the working class, threatening to displace thousands of residents and deepen an already catastrophic housing crisis.

Labor is escalating this offensive, claiming more than \$4 billion in budget "savings" over four years through public-sector job cuts, agency restructuring and other spending reductions. At Labor's campaign launch, Premier Ben Carroll declared that its land-tax concession for affluent and multiple-property-owning voters would be funded through "commonsense decisions to reduce spending."

Coalition leader Jess Wilson has pledged a decade-long public-sector hiring freeze, eliminating thousands of jobs and removing \$22 billion from public expenditure.

Both parties have made clear that, whichever forms government, workers will be made to pay for the crisis.

At the federal level, the Albanese government is savaging the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Its measures are projected to slash \$37.8 billion over four years and remove at least 160,000 people from the scheme, including many children with disabilities, dumping the burden onto families and already devastated state services. We warn that this is only the tip of the iceberg of cuts. Gutting the NDIS sets the national framework for deeper austerity across every state government.

The SEP fights for what workers and society actually need, not what governments and the financial markets declare "affordable."

• **Guarantee free, universal, high-quality healthcare and education. Recruit tens of thousands of essential workers in secure jobs with**

inflation-busting wage rises. Establish enforceable workload and class-size limits and fully fund disability support, aged care, childcare and income assistance.

• **Launch a massive program of public housing. Halt the demolition of Melbourne's 44 public-housing towers, renovate and expand them under residents' control and guarantee tenants the right to remain in their communities. Impose strict controls on rents and mortgage repayments. Return electricity, gas, water, transport and telecommunications to public ownership under workers' control.**

These demands cannot be realised through appeals to governments committed to enforcing the dictates of the financial markets. They pose the necessity for a political struggle against the subordination of all social need to private profit. They raise the need for the expropriation of the banks and the major corporations, without compensation to their billionaire owners, and their transformation into publicly owned utilities under democratic workers' control as part of a planned socialist economy.

No support for Labor or its parliamentary rivals!

Labor, which has governed Victoria for 33 of the past 44 years, is polling at about 24 percent, while the Coalition is below 30 percent. One Nation, a racist and authoritarian far-right organisation, is at about 23 percent. Never has any third party, let alone a far-right party, polled at levels comparable to both major parties in Victoria, Australia's second-most populous state and an historic centre of the working class.

This is a sharp expression of the crisis of Australia's two-party system, which is part of an international process of the decay of the old political establishments amid massive geopolitical and social tensions.

Despite widespread hostility to the major parties, the election offers workers no progressive outcome. We insist this election will resolve nothing for ordinary people. It could return a Labor government committed to deeper austerity, install a right-wing Coalition government pledging more cuts, or produce a parliament in which the far-right One Nation holds the balance of power or is brought into government.

One Nation's rise is a serious warning. It is being promoted by sections of the ruling elite as a more openly authoritarian instrument for imposing the corporate agenda. It scapegoats immigrants and refugees for a housing and social catastrophe caused by capitalism, while demanding lower taxes for business, increased productivity, deregulation, harsher policing, the destruction of public agencies and the criminalisation of children as young as ten.

How has this happened? Above all, One Nation's rise is the product of decades of Labor and Coalition governments imposing falling real wages, unaffordable housing, privatisation and the degradation of health and education, enforced by the trade union bureaucracies. They have created the social misery that One Nation attempts to exploit. Central responsibility lies with Labor, which has incorporated far-right policies through its assaults on refugees, expanded deportations, promotion of nationalism, "law-and-order" campaigns and attacks on democratic rights, and with the trade unions that prop it up.

The Greens posture as a progressive force, but they are a parliamentary party whose real perspective is horse-trading with Labor. Their record, federally and in Victoria, is collaboration with Labor governments that cut social spending, attacked democratic rights and subordinated everything to the requirements of militarism. Their role is to preserve illusions that the existing order can be pressured into a more humane form.

The campaign of the Victorian Socialists, the electoral front of the pseudo-left Socialist Alternative, is directed toward capturing widespread anti-capitalist sentiment and the attraction of workers and young people to

socialism, only to channel it back behind parliament. Its campaign website quotes its leading candidate Jordan van den Lamb: “We need people in parliament who will stand up to the billionaires and big corporate interests that dominate politics and fight for the working class and the least well off. That’s what socialists are all about.”

This is not a socialist perspective. Parliament is not a neutral institution that can be made to serve the working class through the election of better individuals. It is a central instrument of the capitalist state. Under conditions in which parliamentary democracy is itself breaking down—amid war, austerity and the turn to authoritarian forms of rule—the Victorian Socialists are attempting to railroad growing opposition into the same setup through which this reactionary agenda is being imposed.

This program reflects the interests not of the working class but of an upper-middle-class layer seeking influence and privileges within parliament, the union apparatus, academia and the state. Its interests are bound up with the maintenance of capitalism, not its abolition. The Victorian Socialists function as a safety valve and last line of defence for capitalism, giving the discredited parliamentary order a “socialist” label while blocking the development of an independent revolutionary movement of the working class.

The most dangerous illusion is that this election will somehow be different—that a vote for Labor, the Greens or a parliamentary “left” will force the political establishment to change course. Decades of war, austerity, privatisation and attacks on democratic rights demonstrate the opposite: appeals to the parties responsible and electoral manoeuvres within their parliamentary system cannot halt the assault on the working class. Workers and young people must make a decisive break with every capitalist party and parliamentary politics, and take up an independent political struggle.

Build rank-and-file committees!

The social anger behind the fracturing of the two-party system is also driving an escalation of the class struggle. Teachers, doctors, healthcare staff and other sections of workers in Victoria are entering into struggle against intolerable workloads, collapsing conditions and real-wage cuts as part of an emerging upsurge of the working class across Australia and internationally.

The Victorian teachers’ struggle showed what workers are up against: not only the Labor government and the state, but also a trade union bureaucracy committed to imposing cuts to wages and conditions.

After a 98 percent vote for industrial action, more than 40,000 educators struck in March. For the first time in more than four decades, teachers and education-support staff twice rejected agreements promoted by the Australian Education Union (AEU) bureaucracy and Labor.

The decisive conflict was between educators determined to fight and an AEU apparatus determined to shut the struggle down. The bureaucracy censored critics, isolated teachers, returned repeatedly to closed-door talks and repackaged essentially the same agreement until exhausted educators saw no organised means to continue. The final deal blocks strikes until 2030 while leaving teachers working 50–60 hours a week, without enforceable workload limits or class-size caps.

This was not the result of errors by individual officials. The union apparatus is integrated into management, the Labor Party and the state. Its privileged bureaucracy suppresses workers’ initiative, divides struggles and enforces what governments and employers declare “affordable.” The pseudo-left assists this operation by promoting pressure on the union leadership as the only way forward.

The same relationship is exposed by the federal Labor government’s

takeover of the CFMEU construction division, removing elected officials and placing the union under quasi-dictatorial administration for up to five years. This had nothing to do with fighting corruption, but was aimed at disciplining a historically militant section of the working class. In Victoria, the Labor government attempted to pass legislation that would have enabled authorities to refuse registration to, or wind up, industrial organisations. Its purpose was to entrench the corporatist union bureaucracies and prevent workers from forming new organisations outside their control to mount a genuine resistance to attacks on jobs, wages and conditions.

Teachers rebelled against the AEU-Labor agreements, but their opposition was isolated and ultimately contained because independent organisation was not sufficiently developed for them to unify schools, formulate their own demands and appeal directly to parents and other sections of workers. That is why the SEP fights for rank-and-file committees in every school, hospital, construction site and workplace. Democratically controlled by workers and independent of the union apparatuses and all capitalist parties, such committees are necessary to break the bureaucratic stranglehold, unite struggles and prepare a political counteroffensive against austerity and war.

The growth of the class struggle is international. Workers globally are confronting the same assault on jobs, wages, public services and democratic rights, and the same efforts by union bureaucracies and pseudo-left organisations to suppress their struggles and tie them to the capitalist state. Through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, workers must link their struggles across industries and national borders and unify them in a common fight against global capitalism.

Build the SEP! Fight for workers’ power and world socialism!

The SEP is not standing in the election to win a place within the existing parliamentary setup or to pressure one or another of its parties. Its campaign is directed toward explaining the real issues, clarifying the political tasks confronting the working class and building the revolutionary leadership required for the struggles ahead.

Workers in Victoria confront the same basic crisis as workers throughout Australia and internationally: war, austerity, dictatorship, staggering inequality and the subordination of every aspect of social life to profit. There is no solution within Victoria, and no national solution within Australia. What is required is the building of a unified global movement of the working class against capitalism.

That is the significance of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the world Trotskyist movement, of which the SEP is the Australian section. The ICFI fights to unite workers internationally on the basis of a common socialist program. It draws on the lessons of struggles defeated when workers were subordinated to capitalist parties and nationalist policies, and fights to build the independent leadership needed to prevent those betrayals being repeated.

The coming struggles against war, austerity and authoritarianism can succeed only through building in advance a revolutionary leadership armed with such an international socialist perspective. Joining the SEP means helping to build that leadership and organise workers independently of Labor and the union bureaucracy.

Support the SEP campaign. Distribute this statement, attend our meetings, discuss this program in workplaces, schools and universities, build rank-and-file committees and apply to join the SEP. The urgent task is to transform mounting anger and struggle into a conscious movement of the international working class for world socialist revolution.

- **Stop imperialist war! End AUKUS and the US alliance!**
- **Reject Labor, the Coalition, One Nation, the Greens and their pseudo-left defenders!**
- **Build rank-and-file committees and unite workers internationally!**
- **Expropriate the banks and corporations! Billions for health, education, housing and wages—not war and profit!**
- **For a workers' government and world socialism! Build the Socialist Equality Party!**

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