Australia: Victorian Socialists “aren’t a revolutionary party, and they don’t claim to be”

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Social media comments by one of their own candidates have underscored the reality that neither the Victorian Socialists (VS) nor Socialist Alternative (SAlt), which spawned them, has anything to do with the fight for revolutionary socialism. Both are hostile to it.

“Victorian Socialists aren’t a revolutionary party, and they don’t claim to be,” Alex Vangalen, the VS candidate for Benambra in the November Victorian state election, wrote on the *World Socialist Web Site’s* Facebook page last week.

In a follow-up comment, Vangalen declared that VS was “trying to implement democratic socialism on the precipice of capitalisms collapse. Either it works, or it doesn’t and the revolution will come thereafter. Electoral reformism does not obstruct a revolution.”

The comments reveal more than Vangalen himself. They expose VS as a catch-all electoral outfit that uses the label of socialism to promote the claim that capitalism can be reformed through parliament.

More significantly, they expose the fraud of SAlt’s claims to revolutionary socialism. VS is the electoral front of SAlt, which is building a party that openly repudiates socialist revolution and promotes parliament as the means of social change.

Vangalen was responding to a Socialist Equality Party (SEP) statement warning that VS is a political trap for workers and young people searching for a socialist alternative to the depredations of capitalism. The SEP statement exposed VS’s fraudulent claim that the immense social problems confronting workers can be resolved through state elections and pressure and appeals to the incoming government.

In attempting to refute the SEP, Vangalen only reinforced its central point. He did not even address, let alone refute, the gaping chasm between the threadbare reformist palliatives advanced by VS and the immense crisis of world capitalism.

The world capitalist system is plunging humanity towards a third world war, with escalating conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East and US preparations for war against China. To fund this descent into war, governments internationally are imposing sweeping attacks on living standards and social services, while turning increasingly towards authoritarian forms of rule.

In Australia, the Labor government is spending hundreds of billions on the military and integrating Australia into US war plans while slashing social expenditure. In Victoria, both major parties are committed to austerity, amid a deepening cost-of-living crisis and widespread hostility to the political establishment.

These are not temporary problems that parliament can resolve. They are expressions of the historic crisis of capitalism that pose stark alternatives for humanity: socialist revolution or barbarism.

Yet amid this deepening catastrophe, the Victorian Socialists proudly declare that they are not revolutionary!

Vangalen even acknowledges that capitalism is on the “precipice” of collapse. But his answer is to try parliamentary reformism first, leaving revolution for some unspecified future if that fails.

To justify this rejection of a revolutionary socialist perspective, Vangalen resorted to empty assertions that workers do not agree with such a perspective and are not ready for it.

In fact, a radicalisation of workers and young people is underway. Capitalism is once again a dirty word and there is widespread interest in socialism. That is precisely what VS is seeking to exploit.

But Vangalen repeats the age-old argument of opportunists, who justify their own adaptation to capitalism by blaming the working class for being “backward.”

His assertion that “electoral reformism does not obstruct a revolution” flies in the face of the entire history of the socialist movement. Far from preparing the way for revolution, reformist parties have always defended capitalism against revolutionary struggles of the working class.

The role of reformism was laid bare in 1914, when the social-democratic parties of the Second International, expressing the interests of privileged trade union and parliamentary bureaucracies, backed their own ruling classes in the imperialist slaughter of World War I. In the revolutionary upheavals that followed, social-democratic leaders sought to suppress the working-class revolutions, most notoriously in Germany in

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1918–19, where the SPD government deployed right-wing military forces against revolutionary workers.

Australia provides its own damning record. Labor, one of the principal parties of capitalist rule since federation in 1901, was founded on precisely the program of "electoral reformism" that Vangalen claims "does not obstruct a revolution."

Its history demonstrates the opposite. Labor governments have defended capitalism, imposed austerity and supported imperialist wars, while the party and its trade union apparatus have suppressed independent working-class struggles and blocked the development of a revolutionary socialist movement.

Labor's transformation into an unalloyed instrument of finance capital underscores the bankruptcy of reformism. Under conditions of capitalism's deepening crisis, even the limited social reforms of the past are being dismantled. Far from offering concessions to the working class, Labor governments are spearheading social counterrevolution, while funnelling billions into militarism and war.

Vangalen's invocation of "democratic socialism" recalls the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which has played a central role in channelling growing anti-capitalist sentiment in the United States back behind the Democratic Party. Its leading figures, including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, backed the Biden administration, despite its support for Israel's genocide in Gaza and the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

The DSA is now seeking to prevent mass opposition to the Trump administration from breaking with the Democrats and acquiring a socialist perspective. Its most prominent representative, New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani, has held repeated cordial meetings with Trump, including hosting him at his official residence in September.

VS is seeking to play a similar role as a left-populist safety valve for a capitalist political establishment in crisis. Like the DSA and similar formations in Europe, its election program does not call for the nationalisation of the major banks and corporations. Instead, it promises a "better, fairer Victoria," leaving capitalist property relations intact and promoting illusions in a parliament whose major parties are committed to austerity.

The responsibility for this political fraud lies above all with SAlt, the dominant force within VS. SAlt emerged from a tendency that broke with the Trotskyist movement decades ago, based on a rejection of the fight to build an independent revolutionary party of the working class and an orientation towards social democracy and the trade union bureaucracy.

For years, SAlt abstained from elections, flatly declaring electoral participation impermissible. Now it is engaged in a frenetic electoral expansion through VS and the newly established Australian Socialist Party.

Amid the discrediting of the traditional parties of capitalist rule, SAlt is seeking to fill the political vacuum with a new parliamentary formation. Its objective role is to contain growing opposition to capitalism, defend parliamentarism and direct workers and young people back towards the established parties, including the Greens and Labor.

Its perspective is a broad popular-front political alignment with any and all parties claiming to oppose One Nation, which has surged in the polls in Victoria and nationally. VS is standing candidates in every electorate, including longstanding Liberal and National strongholds such as Benambra, where Vangalen is standing.

The aim is to camouflage the political responsibility of Labor, the Greens and the trade union bureaucracy for the rise of One Nation. Their record of imposing or facilitating attacks on social programs, jobs and wages, together with Labor's attacks on immigrants, has created fertile ground for the far-right formation, which could emerge from the November 28 election in a position to participate in government.

SAlt's open turn to reformism—in a period that poses the alternatives of revolution or counterrevolution—again demonstrates that the pseudo-left is a last line of defence of capitalism and is hostile to the interests of the working class.

SAlt's electoral fronts serve to politically blind and disarm the working class, fostering illusions in the very institutions through which the ruling elite is imposing austerity and preparing for war. They articulate the interests of privileged layers of the upper-middle class seeking greater influence, positions and privileges within the existing order.

The SEP is contesting the Victorian election, standing Morgan Peach and Peter Byrne in Northern Metropolitan, to advance an entirely opposed perspective: to expose the charade of parliament and fight for the independent political mobilisation of the working class against war, austerity and capitalism, to establish a workers' government and implement socialist policies.

As in the United States and internationally, the building of an independent socialist movement of the working class on a revolutionary program can proceed only through an uncompromising political struggle against the pseudo-left tendencies that seek to subordinate workers and young people to capitalist politics.

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