Victorian election: Stop the demolition of public housing towers!

Peter Byrne, SEP candidate for the Northern Metropolitan Region
17 November 2026

In the Victorian election campaign, the soaring costs of housing and the destruction of public housing are central to the cost-of-living crisis that is fuelling anger, disaffection and hostility to the entire political establishment—the ruling Labor Party as well as the Greens, the Liberal Party and the far right One Nation Party.

None of them has any solution to the mortgage and rental stress facing millions, nor to the chronic homelessness that is only worsening. All of these parties defend the profit system and bow to the dictates of the financial and corporate elite. They are committed above all to rein in government debt by slashing social spending, including on housing, in order to maintain the state's credit rating.

One of the sharpest expressions of the Labor government's contempt for the working class is the announcement by Premier Daniel Andrews in 2023 of plans to demolish Melbourne's 44 public housing towers, the largest destruction of public housing in Australia's history.

Morgan Peach and myself, Peter Byrne, are standing as candidates for the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in the upper house Northern Metropolitan region to advance a revolutionary socialist program for the working class. Decent, affordable accommodation must be a basic social right for all. But that is impossible under capitalism when the housing industry is in the hands of the banks, major developers and construction corporations, all of which derive huge profits.

We call on all workers, particularly building workers, to take action to halt the demolition of the public housing towers, which is a massive assault on some of the most vulnerable sections of the working class.

Significantly, when he made the announcement, Andrews was flanked by representatives of the superannuation funds and property developers who stand to reap large profits from the redevelopment of some of the most valuable inner-city real estate in Australia. No amount of pressure on the next government, whether led by Labor or Liberal, is going to halt the destruction.

Demolition of all 44 towers will cut 6,600 flats, more than 1 in 10 public housing units throughout Victoria. The government plans to replace them with around 7,000 privately-owned community housing units along with nearly 13,000 private apartments to be sold or rented to the highest bidders.

More than 10,000 public housing residents are to be displaced—the overwhelming majority are immigrants, the elderly, refugees, people with disabilities and low-income families. Many have lived on these public estates for decades. Whole communities are to be broken up. Their various clubs and cultural groups, vegetable gardens and decades-long relationships are to be dismantled.

The towers themselves are not "unsafe" or "past their use-by date" as the Labor government claims. Independent engineers and architects have demonstrated that the towers can be refurbished at a fraction of the cost of demolition. The callous real agenda is to reduce state debt by selling off or leasing public land to developers, and to hand over the prime real estate to private profiteers.

This is not just a Victorian phenomenon. The NSW Labor government is privatising Australia's largest public housing estate in Waterloo. Internationally, governments are cutting public housing stock. Moreover, this is only the most visible expression of the destruction of public housing that has taken place over decades—as part of the far broader privatisation of essential public services.

The public housing estates were built after World War II—owned, managed and maintained by the government. Those in areas such as Broadmeadows, designed to accommodate the workforce for Ford and other industries in the area, have largely gone. Rents were fixed at 25 percent of household income.

Over the past three decades, public housing has been systematically run down, sold off and transferred to non-government providers. In the mid-1990s, public housing accounted for more than 5 percent of Australia's housing stock, compared with approximately 2.6 percent today. This decline has occurred amid soaring house prices and rents, which have placed home ownership increasingly beyond the reach of working-class families and left millions struggling with housing costs.

In Victoria, public housing stock has remained virtually stagnant over the past decade, despite substantial population growth and mounting demand. As of June 2025, the state had just over 64,000 public housing dwellings, while more than 57,000 households were on the Victorian Housing Register in

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March 2026. Rather than expanding public housing to address this crisis, the Labor government is proceeding with the demolition of thousands of existing public housing apartments.

In the 1980s, the Victorian government established "community" housing which is owned by non-government entities and is subject to market forces. The government muddies the distinction between public and community housing by using the umbrella term "social" housing to cover up its long-term strategy of effectively privatising public housing.

There has been broad opposition to the destruction of the public housing towers. Three years after the announcement, two of the 44 towers have already been demolished and three more sit almost vacant, with a handful of residents who have refused to leave. Their eviction is only delayed by a High Court challenge.

The destruction of the homes of thousands of families and individuals is not going to be halted by pressuring the government or through court action. It is only going to be halted by the independent mobilisation of the working class in a determined political and industrial campaign—action which is opposed by the unions, the Greens and various pseudo-left groups that have postured as opponents of the demolition.

The unions made bleating references to the demolition at the 2023 Labor Party conference and then promptly gave the green light for the destruction of the first two towers. The CFMEU, which could stop the demolition tomorrow by having its members down tools, has done everything in its power to prevent industrial action. The union officials and the superannuation funds they control are connected by a thousand threads to the very government and developers whose interests lie in suppressing the struggle of workers.

The Greens announced earlier this year that they would make the demolition a November state election issue to demobilise protests that erupted. Their whole perspective is to enter into a power-sharing arrangement or even a coalition with Labor—the very architects of the demolition.

The Victorian Socialists claim to oppose the demolition of the towers. But they promote the unions that are facilitating it and are preferencing the Labor Party on their how-to-vote cards, peddling the lie that it is a lesser evil.

All of these so-called progressives and "socialists" act to confine the issue to the parliamentary set-up and the political establishment—a sure-fired guarantee that the destruction will proceed unimpeded.

The Socialist Equality Party has fought for an entirely opposed perspective and will continue to do so after the election. It formed the Neighbourhood Action Committee to Oppose the Demolition of the Public Housing Towers (NAC) which has campaigned among residents and workers more broadly for an independent mobilisation of the working class.

The NAC has campaigned at building sites, calling on construction workers to form rank-and-file committees, independent of the union bureaucracy, to prepare industrial action to block the demolitions. Tower residents from the NAC have addressed teachers who strongly condemned the Labor government assault after the lie that the towers were unfit for habitation was exposed.

The vast majority of working people confront soaring rents and huge mortgages and understand only too well the struggle to maintain a roof over their heads. The fight to halt the demolition of public housing must be developed as part of a broader struggle to secure the social right of everyone to decent, affordable housing, along with free, high-quality health care, education and other essential services.

The SEP calls for a massive, multi-billion-dollar program to construct high-quality public housing to meet the needs of the population, not the profit demands of developers and financiers. Ending the housing crisis requires a political struggle against capitalism, including placing the banks, major property developers and construction corporations under public ownership and democratic workers' control. Only on this socialist basis can society's vast resources be used to guarantee housing and other essential needs as fundamental social rights.

We are standing in this election as part of the political struggle to build such a movement of the working class, against all the defenders of capitalism, particularly Labor, the trade unions and their pseudo-left apologists. We call on workers and youth to participate in this campaign, donate to our election fund and to attend our public meeting this weekend.

WHEN: 2:30 pm Sunday, 22 November

WHERE: Djerring Flemington Hub, 25 Mt Alexander Rd, Flemington VIC 3031

Register to save your seat!

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

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