Victorian election: Greens' "progressive" promises conceal pro-business, pro-war politics

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Victoria's November 28 election is unfolding amid a profound crisis of capitalist rule. Labor's attacks on living standards and public services have fuelled mounting hostility, while support for the traditional governing parties nationally has fallen to historic lows.

The establishment parties are concealing both Australia's integration into US-led war preparations and the austerity offensive that workers will confront whichever party or parties form the next state government. Workers and young people face the same essential questions as their counterparts internationally: how to fight austerity, authoritarianism and the threat of world war.

Victorian Greens leader Ellen Sandell declared in September that people are "fed up with Labor and ready to vote Greens to replace them." Her appeal is directed at the growing opposition to Labor, whose state and federal governments have presided over declining living standards, attacks on essential services and Australia's deepening involvement in US-led wars, including the Gaza genocide.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) warns that the Greens are seeking to divert this opposition back into the parliamentary system. Behind their left-sounding rhetoric is the claim that workers can defend their interests by electing more Greens to negotiate with the very parties responsible for war and austerity.

The fraud of this perspective is exposed by the Greens' own election promises. Even if implemented in full, they would do little to resolve the immense social crisis confronting working people.

Take the Greens' much-publicised supermarket policy. Amid soaring food prices and enormous profits for Coles and Woolworths, the party proposes spending $350 million over four years on a trial of just ten publicly-owned stores across Victoria, offering essential groceries at prices 30 percent below those of the major chains. Even if the scheme went ahead, the overwhelming majority of Victorians would remain at the mercy of the supermarket giants, whose domination of food distribution would be untouched.

Their housing program is similarly limited. A two-year rent freeze would initially lock in today's exorbitant rents, with subsequent increases permitted. The Greens promise 88,000 additional public homes, beginning with $4 billion for construction, maintenance and upgrades. But the banks, property developers and landlords would continue to dominate housing provision, while hundreds of thousands of households struggle to pay their rent or mortgages.

Promises of free public transport and public dentistry appeal to workers struggling with soaring costs. But the Greens offer no means of securing these essential services other than through parliamentary negotiations over taxation and government spending. The banks and major corporations would retain their grip over the economy, while governments continue to insist that spending on essential services must be subordinated to the demands of big business.

The same contradiction runs through the Greens' climate policies. They promise to address the environmental catastrophe through market mechanisms, regulation and limited reforms, while leaving the giant corporations responsible for pollution in control of production. Climate change is a global crisis that cannot be resolved within the framework of competing capitalist nation-states and the profit system.

The threadbare character of this program is striking given the Greens' turn to left-populist rhetoric under new federal leader David Shoebridge. At his October National Press Club address, Shoebridge proposed tax changes and an income-support supplement of $1,092 annually—just $21 a week, roughly the price of a kilogram of lean beef mince. Such paltry relief was presented as a major response to the hardship confronting pensioners, unemployed workers and students.

The Greens are not advancing these measures as part of a struggle against the corporate and financial oligarchy. They are seeking votes to strengthen their hand in negotiations with Labor, holding out the prospect that minor concessions can be extracted from a government carrying out sweeping attacks on working people.

The Greens' record in Victoria exposes where this parliamentary horse-trading leads.

Then leader Samantha Ratnam's 2022 offer to work "cooperatively and constructively with Labor" openly expressed the party's orientation.

In 2023, the Greens raised rent controls and opposition to Labor's public housing tower-demolition program during negotiations over vacant-property taxes. They ultimately backed the tax bill after securing higher rates on persistently empty homes.

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Labor proceeded with its plans to demolish Melbourne's 44 public housing towers, threatening the displacement of around 10,000 residents, including immigrants, elderly people and people with disabilities.

In February 2026, the Greens helped Labor pass a planning overhaul restricting residents' notification and appeal rights for specified developments. In return, they secured powers for councils and the planning minister to require affordable housing contributions from developers. By October, however, the Greens themselves acknowledged that Labor had refused to use these powers.

This is the reality behind the Greens' claim that parliamentary pressure can force Labor to adopt progressive policies. The government obtains the legislation it wants, while the Greens proclaim minor concessions as victories. The attacks on working people continue.

The Greens' talk in this election of "replacing" Labor is a response to widespread anger over Labor's policies. But they offer no alternative to the capitalist program of the government. Their aim is to contain the growing opposition within the parliamentary establishment and prevent it developing into an independent political movement of the working class.

They have performed the same function nationally. The Greens sustained Julia Gillard's minority Labor government through guarantees of confidence and supply, even as it pursued spending cuts, including the announcement of $2.3 billion in higher-education cuts in 2013, which the Greens opposed. In the 2025 federal election, they again centred their campaign on the prospect of cooperation with a minority Labor administration, seeking an arrangement with Anthony Albanese despite Labor's complicity in the Gaza genocide.

The Greens' differences with Labor over militarism are equally fraudulent. Shoebridge's denunciations of the US alliance and AUKUS are bound up with calls for a more independent foreign and military policy for Australian imperialism. The Greens' costed 2025 defence program allocated $4 billion to domestic production of drones, missiles and other military equipment, financed by cancelling selected American weapons purchases.

In Victoria, the Greens propose ending state government expenditure on defence on the grounds that it is a federal responsibility. But federally, they advocate billions for Australian weapons manufacture. Their opposition is not to militarism itself, but to particular forms of military spending and Australia's dependence on the United States.

This is entirely consistent with the Greens' broader record of supporting military interventions under the banner of humanitarianism. The Greens supported the Australian-led intervention in East Timor in 1999 and backed calls for a no-fly zone over Libya in 2011, which became the framework for NATO's bombardment of that country.

The Greens' pro-war politics and their hollow social promises are not separate questions. Both express the class interests represented by the party.

The Greens are a capitalist party, hostile to socialism. Their proposals for higher corporate taxes leave the banks, major industries and financial institutions in private hands. Their entire political strategy rests on the lie that the social crisis can be resolved through parliamentary manoeuvres without challenging the capitalist ownership of society's wealth.

At a time when the ruling class is preparing devastating austerity measures to pay for war and the deepening economic crisis, the Greens promote the illusion that a few more parliamentarians and minor reforms can reverse this agenda.

The working class requires an entirely different perspective. The right to decent housing, free, high-quality healthcare and education, and a safe environment can be secured only through a struggle to place the banks and major corporations under public ownership and democratic workers' control. The fight against war requires the international unity of the working class against capitalism and its division of the world into rival nation-states.

The Socialist Equality Party is standing Morgan Peach and Peter Byrne in the Northern Metropolitan upper-house region to fight for this socialist and internationalist program. The SEP is using the election to expose the preparations for war and austerity concealed by the entire political establishment and to fight for a complete political break with Labor, the Greens and the trade union bureaucracy.

No change in the parliamentary arithmetic will resolve the crisis confronting workers. What is required is the building of an independent revolutionary movement of the working class, fighting for a workers' government and the socialist reorganisation of society to meet human need, not private profit.

The SEP urges workers and young people to support its candidates, participate in its election campaign, study its program and join the party.

Attend the SEP's final election meeting this Sunday, November 22, at 2:30 p.m., at the Djerring Flemington Hub in Flemington or via Zoom. The meeting will address the burning political issues excluded from the leaders' debate. Register now!

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