WATCH: Socialist Equality Party holds final public meeting ahead of Victorian election

Our reporters
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More than 100 workers and young people attended the Socialist Equality Party's (SEP) final public meeting ahead of the November 28 Victorian state election, held in Melbourne on Sunday. The meeting was also broadcast via Zoom, with participants joining from Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane and Newcastle, as well as elsewhere in Victoria.

The audience included health workers, educators, council workers and residents of public housing towers slated for demolition by the state Labor government. Among those attending were workers and residents involved in struggles in which the SEP has actively intervened.

The meeting was addressed by SEP candidates Morgan Peach and Peter Byrne, who are standing in the upper house Northern Metropolitan Region, and SEP assistant national secretary Max Boddy. The full meeting, including the questions and discussion, can be viewed below.

Opening the meeting, Byrne explained that the SEP was standing to bring before workers and young people the fundamental issues suppressed throughout the official election campaign: the developing world war, Australia's involvement in US-led military preparations, and the austerity offensive against the working class.

Peach warned that the election would resolve none of the problems confronting working people. Whatever the outcome, the incoming government would impose further austerity to pay for militarism and corporate profits.

He detailed the historic breakdown of Australia's two-party system, expressed in Labor's collapse in the polls and the rise of the far-right One Nation. Peach explained that Labor and the trade union bureaucracies, through decades of attacks on workers' jobs, wages and conditions, bore central responsibility for creating the social crisis that One Nation was exploiting.

Against all the establishment parties, including the Greens and Victorian Socialists, Peach outlined the SEP's fight to build an independent, international socialist movement of the working class, based on rank-and-file committees and directed towards the establishment of a workers' government and socialism.

Boddy examined the developing world war, which he said every other party contesting the Victorian election was concealing from the population. He traced the connection between the US-led war against Iran, the escalating NATO confrontation with Russia and Washington's preparations for war against China.

He detailed Australia's transformation under the Albanese Labor government into a frontline base for US military operations, including the $368 billion AUKUS submarine program and the expansion of American access to military facilities throughout the country. These preparations, he explained, were inseparable from the assault on public services, wages and democratic rights.

At the same time, Boddy pointed to the growth of international working-class opposition, including major strikes and protests across Europe against austerity and militarism. He referred to the international dockworkers' strike on October 30, involving workers at 113 ports in 22 countries, as a demonstration of the potential power of the working class acting across national borders.

The decisive issue, he explained, was the political perspective and leadership of these developing struggles. Drawing on the experiences of the revolutionary upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s, and the subsequent betrayals of the Labor and trade union apparatuses, Boddy stressed that opposition to capitalism could not succeed without the building of a revolutionary party fighting for the conquest of political power.

The SEP's election campaign, he emphasised, was one stage in that struggle, which would continue and intensify after November 28.

The speeches prompted an animated discussion, with audience members raising questions centred on what workers and young people could do to take forward a struggle against war, austerity and the capitalist political establishment.

Questions concerned the SEP's attitude to parliament and independent candidates, why a revolutionary socialist party contested elections, and how rank-and-file committees could be established to enable workers to take control of their struggles independently of the trade union bureaucracies. Other questions addressed the SEP's opposition to the pseudo-left Victorian Socialists and the political differences between revolutionary socialism and parliamentary reformism.

Following the meeting, attendees spoke to *World Socialist*

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Web Site reporters about the political issues raised.

Stuart, a medical equipment technician, said he regarded the SEP as the only party advancing a genuinely socialist perspective.

He criticised the Victorian Socialists for promoting the illusion that electing supposedly socialist representatives to parliament would deliver reforms for workers. Referring to the election of Democratic Socialists of America member Zohran Mamdani as mayor of New York, Stuart argued that this parliamentary approach would not deliver even the limited reforms it promised.

"If you try to make do and get a little bit of leeway from the government, bourgeoisie, upper elites, whatever you want to call them, you don't get anything," he said.

Stuart contrasted this with the SEP's perspective of building an independent movement of the working class. "The SEP upholds the right of the worker to decide on their lives and how their lives are run," he said.

He explained that he had read the SEP's analysis of Victorian Socialists on the *World Socialist Web Site* and agreed with its criticism. He had decided to support the SEP on the understanding that "the power comes from the workers."

Trazia, a resident of one of the public housing towers threatened with demolition by the Labor government, had become involved with the SEP through its campaign alongside residents fighting to defend their homes.

She said she was particularly concerned by the discussion of the conditions facing young people. She spoke about the lack of employment opportunities for her children and other young adults, who were unable to find work and faced increasing pressure and uncertainty about their futures.

"The more important thing they said [was] about the young people," she commented. "They can work, they can do good things ... They don't need war. And they don't need people who are racist."

Asked about the anti-immigrant agitation of One Nation, Trazia rejected attempts to divide people according to their backgrounds.

"We're still calling [ourselves] migrants, but we're Australian. We have been living here for a long time now," she said.

She also expressed strong opposition to Australia's involvement in war, particularly because of its consequences for children and ordinary families. "We don't need to put our hand in the war that's happening now," she said. "It's really bad for the kids, bad for everything."

Trazia agreed to distribute SEP election material among residents of the public housing towers.

John, a retired industrial sewing machinist, and **Marilyn**, a community worker, described how their longstanding support for Labor had given way to growing disillusionment.

"I've been traditionally a Labor voter and they've let us down over the years," John said. He had followed the history of the labour movement, including the struggles of British coal miners, and had always associated Labor with the interests of workers.

He said the meeting had clarified the relationship between the major parties and the corporate interests they represented.

"The major parties, they make themselves out that they're different, but really they agree on everything. It's just the way they do things—they have minor differences, but really they're the same thing."

John said he had also gained a greater understanding of the transformation of the trade unions. "Today I've learned that ... unions have become corporatised and they're not really for the workers anymore."

Marilyn said the meeting had clarified questions that had previously confused her, particularly the difference between the SEP and Victorian Socialists.

"I came today because I had been once before to a Victorian Socialists meeting years ago. I didn't realise the difference. Today I've left knowing clearly the difference, and I understand that it's about a revolutionary process rather than operating within a parliamentary process."

Marilyn said she had previously retained some hope that parliamentary politics could bring about fundamental change. "I thought there was a bit of hope with that, but now I don't think so."

Both were struck by the discussion of revolutionary leadership and the lessons of past struggles. John referred to the failure of the German revolution following World War I and the necessity for a revolutionary party to be built in advance of great upheavals.

He also made a pointed observation about One Nation's ability to exploit popular discontent.

"One Nation is successful because she [Pauline Hanson] simplifies it, but the only problem is she's lying. If you simplify it with truth, I'm sure that it would break through to the masses."

Marilyn said that when they had told acquaintances they were attending a socialist meeting, some had reacted with apprehension. They were now looking forward to distributing SEP material and discussing what they had learned.

"It'd be great to go back now with our hundred handouts to be able to give to people and say what we did today," she said.

John added: "I think the more we learn about history, the more we'll be better for the future, to prepare for the future."

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