Fake-left Victorian Socialists preferencing big-business Labor Party and the Greens

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Victorian Socialists (VS), the electoral front of the pseudo-left Socialist Alternative (SAlt), is encouraging its voters to preference the Labor government and the Greens in this Saturday's Victorian state election.

That decision underscores the reality that VS has nothing to do with socialism. As the Socialist Equality Party has warned, it is a political trap, aimed at diverting mounting anti-capitalist sentiment among workers and young people back behind the parliamentary establishment and the parties of big business.

VS does not appear to have issued any statement on its preference decision. Instead, it has simply registered how to vote cards with the Victorian Electoral Commission, outlining those preferences. Several of its candidates have also circulated images of the how-to-vote cards and provided technical explanations of preferential voting, without offering any political explanation for their choice of preferences.

The preference recommendations are a statewide policy. In all eight upper house regions, VS is recommending preferences for the Greens and a fifth preference for Labor. The same basic policy is being pursued in the lower house, where VS is directing preferences to the Greens and Labor ahead of the Liberals.

While Victoria's system of compulsory preferencing is undemocratic, there is no requirement for parties to recommend preferences. As a number of other parties have done, VS could have simply explained the requirements for casting a valid ballot, leaving voters to determine their own preferences.

VS' decision to recommend preferences for Labor and the Greens is a political one. It is the fraud that Labor and the Greens are a "lesser-evil" and should therefore be given support.

The reason that VS is peddling this line so sheepishly, without even an explicit statement, is because of how discredited lesser-evilism is. The Victorian election is an expression of a massive crisis of the two-party system, and particularly of Labor, which is widely predicted to lose in a landslide.

The widespread hostility to Labor in the working class is the product of its record over 12 years in office. Labor has imposed real wage cuts on public sector workers, slashed jobs and funding for essential services and, amid an acute housing crisis, initiated the largest demolition of public housing in the state's history.

This record of austerity and privatisation has been accompanied by an assault on democratic rights, including restrictions on protests, an expansion of police powers and increasingly draconian law-and-order legislation.

That is completely in line with the program of the federal Labor government. It is carrying out a massive expansion of the military and of American basing, to complete Australia's transformation into a staging base for a US-led assault on China, while supporting all of the wars that are already underway, including the Israeli genocide in Gaza, the attack on Iran and the US-NATO proxy conflict with Russia in Ukraine.

The war abroad is accompanied by a war against the working class, including $63.8 billion in spending cuts unveiled in the last federal budget, centred on kicking hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people off the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Labor, in other words, is presiding over a program of reaction all down the line, paralleling the response of big business governments the world over to the unfolding breakdown of capitalism.

In the Victorian election, Labor is competing with the Liberals in a pitch to the corporate elite, over which party will be best placed to carry out massive spending cuts to eliminate the state's ballooning debt. Ben Carroll, the Labor premier that VS is attempting to have reelected, has proclaimed: "I'm a pro-business, financially responsible Premier."

As for the Greens, like VS they make populist denunciations of the major parties, and posture as defenders of public health and education. But the Greens are an openly capitalist party and their entire perspective, including in the Victorian election, is to form a power-sharing arrangement or even a coalition government with Labor. They are, in other words, a shadow of Labor.

The election has been marked by the rise of the far-right One Nation party, which is polling at record levels ahead of Labor. If they were to justify their preference arrangement,VS may point to the need to block One Nation through the ballot box.

But that too is a complete fraud. It is Labor and the corporatised trade union bureaucracy that is responsible for

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One Nation's rise.

Through their relentless assault on the social and living conditions of ordinary people, Labor and the unions have created the social crisis that the far-right demagogues exploit. And One Nation's own scapegoating of immigrants is based on the historical legacy and current program of Labor, which was founded as the party of "White Australia," and is currently presiding over a major crackdown of immigrants and refugees.

The real function of VS' promotion of Labor and the Greens is to chain workers and young people to a rotting political establishment that, whatever its tactical differences, is unanimous on a program of war, austerity and deepening authoritarianism.

VS provides a cover for that agenda. Its election manifesto claims that reforms can be won through the incoming parliament to create a "better, fairer Victoria," under conditions where massive social attacks, not reforms, are the bipartisan agenda. The VS program accepts the whole framework not only of parliament, but of capitalism itself. It calls for the establishment of a state-owned bank, not the nationalisation of the massive banks and corporations, and it suggests a modest tax on the billionaires, not their expropriation.

The role that VS is attempting to play mirrors that of other pseudo-left formations internationally, such as the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). The DSA is doing everything it can to subordinate mass popular opposition to the Democrats, a party of Wall Street and the CIA, while some of its most prominent representatives, such as New York City mayor Zohran Mamdani, are openly collaborating with Donald Trump as he seeks to establish a fascistic dictatorship in the interests of the oligarchy.

The fact that VS is seeking to emulate the DSA model exposes SAlt, which controls it tightly as an electoral front. SAlt is based on a tendency that broke from the Trotskyist movement decades ago, based on a rejection of the fight to build an independent revolutionary party of the working class, and a turn to other forces, particularly social democracy and the trade union bureaucracy.

The VS campaign is another marker of SAlt's massive shift to the right. In response to an unprecedented crisis of the two-party system and the entire capitalist parliamentary establishment, it is seeking to revive illusions in both and to prop up Labor, which has been the chief instrument of capitalist rule in Australia since Federation.

That reflects the reality that SAlt and VS do not advance the interests of the working class, but are hostile to it. Instead, they are the political representatives of an affluent layer of the upper middle-class, which seeks to advance its own privileges within the framework of capitalism, particularly through academia, the union bureaucracy and the top echelons of the union bureaucracy.

To that list must be added parliament. The one element of the VS campaign that is not confected is the great excitement of SAlt's leadership over the prospect of winning one or two seats in the upper house of the Victorian parliament. They scarcely conceal the fact that for them, entering that decrepit institution would amount to joining the major league.

The preferences, aside from pulling the wool over the eyes of workers and young people, are intended as a signal to Labor, the Greens and the ruling elite itself that if they did have any parliamentary seats, VS would collaborate with those capitalist parties.

The SEP, which is standing Morgan Peach and Peter Byrne for the Northern Metropolitan Region, is advancing a diametrically opposed perspective: the need for a complete break with the capitalist parties and the building of an independent, socialist movement of the working class.

The SEP and its candidates have exposed the fraud of the official election campaign, including the bipartisan commitment to austerity whichever parties form government. It has fought against the conspiracy of silence by all of the official parties, and VS, on the immense dangers of the global war that is unfolding.

The SEP has raised the need for workers to form rank-and-file committees, independent of the corporatised union bureaucracy that SAlt and VS defend, as the means of establishing a democratic discussion in the working class and of preparing an industrial and political struggle against the offensive on jobs, wages and living conditions, and the evisceration of essential services.

The SEP has told the truth: that the election will resolve nothing. The critical issue is transforming mass anger and discontent into a conscious mass movement, fighting for the socialist transformation of society. Workers and young people should reject the phony lesser-evilism of VS, vote for the SEP candidates and above all join that crucial struggle for a revolutionary alternative to a capitalist system that is hurtling towards barbarism.

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