

SEP candidate explains why she joined the party

Tania Baptist and Socialist Equality Party candidate for the Senate in Victoria
26 October 2007

Below is the report delivered by SEP Senate candidate Tania Baptist to the Socialist Equality Party's public election launch in Melbourne last Sunday. Also addressing the meeting were SEP candidates Will Marshall (Melbourne) and Frank Gaglioti (Calwell). Nick Beams, SEP national secretary and candidate for the Senate in NSW, was the main speaker. His speech can be found at [here](#).

Being relatively new to the SEP and politics generally, I've been asked by the party to speak to you today about the experiences and the process which I have gone through which have led me, firstly, to join the Socialist Equality Party, and secondly, to stand as a Senate candidate in the upcoming election.

It seems a little egotistical to me to be talking about myself when other party members are talking about world historical events. But my experiences are important, because they reflect the experiences through which millions of people all over the world are passing, and underscore the significance of the party's role in clarifying those experiences and influencing the conclusions that are being drawn from them.

Being actively involved in politics is not something I would ever have thought I would do earlier in my life. I had opinions about political issues but generally saw them in a disconnected way. Politics seemed unrelated to my life, and political activity was something that others do. I never really saw a need to be actively involved, or that my contribution was necessary or important. As well, most politicians I had seen did not attract me to politics.

I certainly never would have believed that I would stand as a candidate in a Federal Election. I'm not exactly comfortable or outspoken in a crowd—in fact I like to fade into the background.

Despite all of this, I was propelled towards politics by events.

Over a period of a few years, I became more and more

aware and concerned about what was going on in the world—poverty, the environment, human rights issues, and so on. I did small things, like sponsoring a child in Africa and donating regularly to Amnesty International. At the same time, I became more aware of politics, and increasingly disgusted with the attitude of the major parties to most issues. Through this period I was looking at other parties and began voting for the Greens, thinking they were some kind of alternative.

The September 11 attacks were a real eye-opener for me, as they were for many people. The response of political leaders around the world seemed to me to be completely irrational. No attempt was made to consider or understand the conditions that would lead young men to fly planes into buildings, killing themselves and thousands of other people—quite a significant thing for a person to feel that they have to do. Instead the facile explanation given was that there was good and evil, and that evil people wanted to destroy “our way of life”.

During the build-up to the Iraq war, it was obvious to me that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and no connections to Al Qaeda or September 11. Whatever was wrong with Saddam Hussein, there seemed to be no valid reason for invading a country against international law. It seems silly to me now, but prior to the invasion, I didn't believe they would actually do it. I thought somehow, they would come to their senses.

The invasion of Iraq was a turning point for me. I was stunned at first and then I became angry. I started firing off irate tirades to the *Melbourne Age*. I don't know what I thought it would achieve, but somehow I needed to express my disgust with the mountain of lies we had been fed about the war and everything else, and the outright mass murder which was being carried out, against my wishes, to defend our supposedly democratic way of life.

As the occupation went on, I felt that I had to do something more practical to stop the war. When I look

back now, I can see this was a period of confusion. Like many people, I thought we really had to get rid of Howard. Somehow I didn't see voting for Labor as an option. Mark Latham had blurted out his "troops out by Christmas" line, but wasn't at all convincing. I was reading the Greens' web site and their policies seemed reasonable, and they seemed to oppose the war. So a number of months prior to the 2004 Federal Election, I joined. I don't know how I expected this to work, but the idea of sending a message was promoted a lot.

When Howard was re-elected I was, like many who opposed the war and all of his other criminal acts, extremely disheartened. A couple of weeks later I met a supporter of the Socialist Equality Party, who told me, in no uncertain terms, that I should disabuse myself of my illusions in the Greens and gave me an analysis of their perspective and the role they play. He talked about the proletariat, Trotsky, scientific analysis of capitalism, the Russian Revolution, Marxism. Of course, I had virtually no knowledge or understanding at all of these things. Eventually I asked if there was a web site. The next day I got on the Internet to check it out, expecting to be able to dismiss it and argue with him next time. My previous brushes with supposed socialists had not exactly impressed me.

However, it wasn't so easy to dismiss the *World Socialist Web Site*. To begin with, I was trying to find the holes in it, but I quickly realised that I knew virtually nothing about the world and history, and these people were, at the very least, extremely knowledgeable and thorough. Initially the analysis was quite confronting, and in some ways bewildering, but I was impressed by the depth of information provided and the quality of the writing. I hadn't ever realised that such a systematic and comprehensive study of the world had been, or could be, made. I began reading the site every day, virtually every article, and I also delved into the archives. I came to realise that the news we were getting from the mainstream media was completely inadequate and biased, and when any event occurred I looked forward to getting the real story from the WSWS, as well as their perspective.

Gradually I was convinced by the analysis that the problems that confront us are not separate isolated issues, but are all caused by the capitalist system and the never-ending drive for ever-increasing profits, and that the only way to solve them is to reorganise society on the basis of human needs instead of profit. As I read more and more, it became clearer to me how this could only be

carried out by a unified international working class which is conscious of its tasks, and that the WSWS was working to achieve this through education via the site. It became apparent, and was stated over and over on the site, that one of the most important tasks was building a mass party that was politically independent of all other parties—which were essentially props for the capitalist system. The inexorable logic of this was that I, being one of the working class, had to build the Socialist Equality Party.

Although the international working class is being pushed by the crisis of capitalism into a revolutionary situation, a socialist revolution won't happen without the conscious intervention of workers organised and prepared *in advance* to take advantage of the events. Building the party must be done now. It can't wait. Those of us who read the site and agree with the program and perspective have a responsibility to build the party. If we don't understand it fully, then we have a responsibility to learn more. If we don't do it, who else will?

There are many reasons why I could have chosen not to join the party, and not to stand as a candidate. I don't know enough, I'm not confident enough, I'm not articulate enough, I don't have time. But ultimately these perceived impediments are not just my personal quirks. We all have one or another variation of them. They are the product of a system which actively excludes working people from political life. Actively working to overcome them in the process of building the party is the only way that socialism will be built. That is why I am standing as a Senate candidate for the Socialist Equality Party and I urge you all to seriously study the program and perspective of the party and to participate in our election campaign as fully as you possibly can.

Tania Batpist on YouTube:

Why I joined the SEP.

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Visit the Socialist Equality Party Election Web Site

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>