

SEP candidates in NSW election campaign against war and austerity

By our reporters
3 March 2015

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is campaigning in the March 28 New South Wales (NSW) state election against the agenda of war and austerity that is supported, in one way or another, by every other political party—the ruling Liberal-National coalition as well as the opposition Labor Party, Greens and myriad single issue groups and “independents.”

The election is being held under conditions of a rapidly slowing Australian economy and increasing parliamentary instability at both federal and state levels as popular anger mounts against austerity spending cuts and social inequality, unemployment and poverty.

Since last November, first-term state Liberal governments have been thrown out of office in Queensland and Victoria. These results were not an expression of popular support for Labor, which returned to office after being decisively rejected in previous elections, but protest votes against whoever happened to be in power.

Last Saturday, Oscar Grenfell, the SEP candidate for Bankstown in southwest Sydney, and Noel Holt, the party’s candidate for Wyong, about 90 kilometres north of Sydney on the Central Coast, spoke with voters in their respective electorates. Workers and youth denounced the big business programs and social austerity cutbacks of the state and federal governments and the growing dangers of war. Both electorates have been hard hit by decades of job losses and closures and have youth unemployment levels of about 30 percent.

Oscar Grenfell and SEP supporters campaigned in the Bankstown and Chester Hill shopping centres. Workers, pensioners and youth raised their concerns about worsening living conditions and the danger of war and bitterly criticised the Liberal and Labor parties.

John, an unemployed lawyer, said: “The working class is being sold down the river. Everyone knows

that... The ruling elites are taking us for a ride. The Labor Party is useless; it is completely capitalistic. They sprout a few things but I can’t believe people still support them. They are total shonks.

“I never liked [former Labor Prime Minister Paul] Keating when he was the local member here in Bankstown. He was a scam artist. People said he was so progressive and for the workers. What a load of baloney! He was a free-market man: let’s reduce the wages, let’s get more profits. It was a total charade... He never gave a stuff about the people in Bankstown.”

Asked about the danger of war, John replied: “Of course, that concerns me. Absolutely. We just follow America, like into Iraq. People are told how great America is. One of my nephews moved to America and he’s being screwed, being paid eight bucks an hour. But you know what? There’s a poster in America—it’s actually an ad for a self-storage company—and it says: ‘In the French Revolution, the aristocracy never saw it coming.’

“So you think a revolution is impossible but look at the crazy things that are happening. In Queensland, they tossed out Labor completely three years ago and put the Liberals in, and people said they would be there for three elections, but now they’ve gone! People are sick of being screwed, and something’s going to change.

“All this stuff with the 2008 financial crisis, the banks are just doing it all again. There’s going to be another crash soon, and governments are just letting it happen because the lobbyists and the ruling class control it all.

“It’s fantastic what you’re doing. If I had seen you guys 20 years ago, I would have said, forget about it [a revolution], it’s never going to happen, but not anymore.”

Abdul, a mature-age university student, said: “There’s no support for the working class in the political system in Australia. We don’t really have a Labor Party and the Greens seem to be a bit airy-fairy. If I vote, I just vote to keep the Liberals out, that’s all. So I kind of see an enemy, but I don’t see a friend.

“I have a fundamental problem with capitalism itself. It feeds on inequality and takes advantage of it... Even if we all work hard, there’s only room for one person at the top... So, I’m looking for something totally different.”

Asked about the US-led wars in the Middle East and the Obama administration’s confrontation with Russia over Ukraine, Abdul commented: “America is no different to any other empire. It wants to shut everyone else out and have its voice, while it tries to keep up an appearance of democracy.”

Rona, a retired pensioner, commented: “Liberal and Labor are pretty much the same, so we would be better off putting in someone who is for the workers and the pensioners... People don’t vote governments in, between Liberal and Labor, they vote them out... They both work for the financial people, for where the money is.

“It is very, very difficult to live on the pension. All you can do is sort your food out, so you have enough until the next pension day, and pay your rent—and rents are so high—because you have to have a roof over your head.

Referring to the Abbott government’s lifting of the pension age to 70, Rona, said: “This is ridiculous. It depends on what kind of work you do. I worked in a factory and there’s no way I could have worked until I was 70. If you work 40 or 50 years and you pay your taxes this should be enough. Factory workers cannot work to 70, physically, but for managers sitting on their seats, that’s different.”

In the Wyong electorate, SEP candidate Noel Holt spoke with young people and workers at the Toukley Shopping Centre. Poverty and unemployment is at record levels in the region. More than one in four workers travel to either Sydney or Newcastle to work and at least 28 percent of 15–19 year-olds have no job.

“Both parties are crooks who don’t know how ordinary people live,” one pensioner declared. “While they get all the wealth, we continue to get squashed.”

Anil, who has a small business in Toukley, said:

“None of the political parties represent the ordinary people. All the politicians are coming from different positions, such as heads of the trade unions and big business. They do not understand how common people are living their lives.”

Commenting on Australian involvement in the latest US-led military intervention in the Middle East, Anil said: “War does not make any sense for ordinary people. The situation in Iraq and the Middle East is a self-created situation and one that Australia helped to create.

“First we had Al Qaeda and now we have ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria]—both self-generated problems and now we have to see what is going to be produced next. Only the working people can solve these problems and they need to have their voices heard.”

Michael, a printing industry production manager, said: “I really don’t trust any politicians. Nowadays a politician’s position is: ‘How long can I stay in here and what can I get out of it?’ Their agenda is not made public. Politicians don’t go into parliament to serve the people and they always go back on their word and break promises. It’s just relentless.”

Another worker who had just moved from Queensland stated: “Newman [the former Queensland Liberal premier] was thrown out and now they will just put another crook in. Governments change, but nothing changes for the people. Things just get worse.”

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