

Socialist Equality Party wins important support in Australian federal election

By Oscar Grenfell
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The Socialist Equality Party's campaign in the Australian federal election won important support from a layer of workers, students, young people, professionals and retirees, attracted to a genuine socialist and internationalist alternative to war, austerity and authoritarianism.

In its election statement, the SEP explained that the ballot would resolve nothing for the working class. It insisted that the critical issue for workers was breaking from all of the parties of big business, and building a revolutionary, socialist movement aimed at the abolition of the capitalist system.

The election result has vindicated this perspective. Amid widespread hostility to the Liberal-National Coalition government, the Labor Party suffered an electoral debacle, losing votes in working class and regional areas throughout the country. The swings expressed a deep-going rupture between the working class and Labor, one of the principal props of Australian capitalism, after decades of Labor governments imposing the dictates of the corporate elite.

The outcome also underscored the dangers confronting the working class. In the absence of a mass socialist movement of the working class, the Coalition and various right-wing populists have benefited from the collapse in Labor's support.

The Morrison Coalition government is based on anti-immigrant xenophobia, support for the US military alliance, a commitment to massive tax cuts for big business and for an intensifying assault on social rights. It will inevitably come into conflict with the working class.

In that context, the SEP won a small but significant vote from important layers of the population consciously signalling their support for its program.

With over 80 percent of votes counted in most areas, the SEP's Senate candidates in Victoria, Tessa Pietsch and Jason Wardle, have received 8,820 votes. In New South Wales, Richard Phillips and John Davis won 1,510 votes for the Senate.

SEP candidates in four working-class electorates for the House of Representatives, the lower house of parliament,

also won a powerful response.

In Calwell, in the north-west of Melbourne, Peter Byrne received around 693 votes, or almost one percent of the total. In Hunter, a New South Wales regional electorate, 610 people voted for SEP candidate Max Boddy. In Parramatta, in western Sydney, Oscar Grenfell received 564 votes. Some 579 ballots were cast for Mike Head in the seat of Oxley, located in the south-west of Brisbane.

In 2019, the party's Senate teams in two states, New South Wales and Victoria, have received over 10,500 ballots. The SEP's vote rose substantially compared with the 2016 federal election. In that year, the SEP stood Senate tickets in three states, Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales, securing roughly 6,000 votes.

Amid a blackout of the SEP's campaign in the corporate media and campaigns by a plethora of independents and minor parties, none of the votes for the SEP were accidental. In NSW alone, for instance, the SEP was one of 36 separate tickets on the Senate ballot.

The support for the SEP is the most conscious expression of a growing attraction to socialism, among broad sections of the population, amid a deepening crisis of Australian and world capitalism.

The votes were also a product of the bold campaign waged by the SEP and its candidates. Throughout the brief election, which spanned little more than four weeks, over 80,000 copies of the SEP's election manifesto were distributed, on campaigns and by supporters of the party.

In a campaign in which all of the other parties and the media sought to suppress discussion of the essential political issues, SEP candidates wrote statements, published on the *World Socialist Web Site*, advancing a socialist perspective on the key questions facing the working class. During the campaign, there were 12 such statements and 22 other articles analysing various aspects of the election.

The SEP was alone in centrally raising the defence of WikiLeaks publisher and journalist Julian Assange.

The day after Assange was illegally expelled from Ecuador's London embassy and arrested by the British

police, and hours after the election was called, the SEP held emergency rallies in Sydney and Melbourne, demanding that the Australian government take immediate action to secure Assange's release from Britain and return to Australia, with a guarantee against extradition to the US.

At subsequent protests in Parramatta and Broadmeadows, SEP candidates explained that Assange was being persecuted for his role in exposing the war crimes, mass surveillance operations and global diplomatic conspiracies of the US and all of its allies, including Australia.

The events exposed the gulf between the SEP's principled fight for democratic rights, which won important support, and the refusal of every other party to defend Assange.

The SEP candidates also actively campaigned against the escalating drive to war. They exposed Australia's integration into the US-led preparations for conflict with China, amid trade war measures and military provocations against Beijing by the Trump administration, during the election campaign itself. The SEP insisted on the need for Australian workers and youth to unite with their class brothers and sisters internationally, in a global socialist anti-war movement.

Throughout the election, the SEP exposed the various manifestations of the social crisis confronting the working class, and indicted the official parties and the profit system they defend.

At final SEP election meetings, party candidates and representatives gave reports detailing the major issues confronting workers in the House of Representatives seats the SEP contested.

In Parramatta, Oscar Grenfell reviewed the central responsibility of Labor and the unions for the dismantling of manufacturing in western Sydney and the resultant growth in youth joblessness and precarious employment.

In Hunter, Max Boddy outlined the disastrous consequences of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) introduced by the previous Labor government. He rejected the claims of Labor and the unions that the crisis confronting carers and individuals with disabilities was the product of the Coalition government's "mismanagement" of the scheme, explaining that it was a pro-business scheme devised by Labor from the outset.

In Oxley, Michael Smith, a young SEP member, explained that the electorate and surrounding areas had real unemployment rates approaching 20 percent. He detailed the presence of a toxic dump in the area, linking it to the broader degradation of the environment by the major corporations and the governments that represent them.

In Calwell, Peter Byrne documented the social devastation wrought by the union-enforced shutdown of the car industry, including the emergence of mass unemployment and

poverty. He documented a series of toxic fires in the area, and explained that the social conditions in Broadmeadows demonstrated the need for a break with Labor and the unions.

SEP candidates Mike Head, Richard Phillips and Boddy were interviewed on three radio programs. They outlined the SEP's revolutionary program and answered questions on the party's defence of Assange, its position on climate change and the environment and a host of other issues. Head's interview on 4ZZZ is available here, beginning at 15:20 into the program, Phillips' on 2BOB Radio here and Boddy's on ABC Drive here.

Their authoritative comments, which received an important response, demonstrated that the general media blackout of the SEP's campaign expressed the fear of the corporate elite that given a fair hearing, a socialist alternative can win mass support.

Underscoring the anti-democratic character of the election, there were no candidate debates in most of the electorates contested by the SEP.

In one exception, Boddy debated other candidates contesting Hunter, including the sitting member, Joel Fitzgibbon, a prominent Labor MP. Boddy denounced Labor's refusal to defend Assange, exposed the bogus character of Labor's populist promises and warned that a Greens-backed Labor government would intensify the assault on refugees and on the social rights of the working class.

On polling day, dozens of SEP supporters and contacts assisted party members in distributing the SEP's how-to-vote cards, and election manifesto.

The election outcome, and the deepening global crisis, underscore the urgent necessity for those workers, students and young people who supported the SEP, to take the next step, by studying its program, applying to join and taking up the fight to build it as the socialist leadership of the working class.

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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