

SEP meetings review political lessons of Australia's federal election

By our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) held public meetings in the last week of June to discuss the lessons of the Australian federal election and the critical political issues now facing workers and youth.

Entitled, “Labor’s debacle and the lessons of the Australian election,” the meetings were held in the east coast cities of Newcastle, Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne, where the party stood house of representative candidates. The SEP also ran candidates for Senate seats in Victoria and New South Wales.

Reports from SEP candidates and SEP national committee members on the historic background to Labor’s electoral defeat, the rise of the extreme-right, the danger of imperialist war and the party’s defence of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and US whistleblower Chelsea Manning, provoked a range of questions from workers, youth and retirees in attendance.

Numbers of those who came to the meeting had only met the SEP during the election campaign or through the party’s vigorous defence of Julian Assange. The SEP was the only political party in the election fighting for the release of Assange and Manning.

The Sydney meeting, which was held in the working-class electorate of Parramatta was chaired by SEP Assistant National Secretary Cheryl Crisp and addressed by Max Boddy, the SEP candidate for Hunter, and former SEP National Secretary Nick Beams. Boddy and Beams also addressed the Newcastle meeting.

The Melbourne event was chaired by National Committee member Patrick O’Connor and featured reports from Tessa Pietsch, the SEP’s Senate candidate in Victoria, and Linda Tenenbaum, SEP National Committee member.

Mike Head, the SEP’s candidate for Oxley, and

Oscar Grenfell, who contested the seat of Parramatta, addressed the Brisbane meeting.

Opening the Sydney meeting, Cheryl Crisp said the SEP’s intervention was based on the fight for socialist internationalism and mirrored the election campaign being conducted at the same time by the SGP, the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, which ran 11 candidates in the European parliamentary elections.

The speaker said the votes for the SEP reflected a movement to the left among sections of the working class and youth internationally and showed there is a striving to find a way to resolve the vital issues they face.

Crisp said the SEP’s warnings throughout the election about the escalating danger of imperialist war had been confirmed by Washington’s aggressive military provocations against Tehran, and US President Trump’s admission that he had been just “10 minutes” from launching a strike against Iran.

Trump’s threats, she said, are made under the conditions where the US military is explicitly discussing how it will plan and execute nuclear war.

Max Boddy gave a detailed overview of the anti-democratic persecution of Assange and Manning and explained that the US-led attack on free speech and these heroic individuals, and increasing censorship of the internet, was a clear manifestation of the preparations for war.

Boddy explained the role of the British judiciary in the frame-up of Assange and said Australia’s entire political elite—Liberal, Labor and the Greens—and the corporate media endorsed the imprisonment of the WikiLeaks publisher. He said the fight to secure the release of Assange and Manning was inseparably connected to the political struggle that has to be waged

by the working class in defence of freedom of speech and its own basic democratic rights.

SEP National Committee member Nick Beams told the meeting that Labor's election defeat was a political shock to Labor, the unions and media pundits and pollsters.

However, the vote for Labor, which fell to one of its lowest levels since 1901, he said, was in response to the abandonment of any defence of the interests of the working class by social democratic parties and the unions, not just in Australia, but around world.

"They operate openly as agents of international finance capital and its drive to appropriate an ever-greater portion of the wealth created by the working class the world over," he said.

He reviewed the political record of Labor and the unions, beginning with the Hawke-Keating governments from 1983-96 and the Rudd and Gillard Labor governments, and their systematic attacks on jobs, living standards and basic democratic rights, and Labor military collaboration with US in the Middle East and support for future wars against China and other perceived rivals.

Beams said although the political beneficiaries of this process—in the United States, across Europe and now in Australia—have been extreme-right formations, there was a movement to the left by conscious sections of the working class and among the youth.

This leftward movement, however, can find no expression within the present political framework, he explained. "It must be developed into a conscious political movement, based on a socialist and internationalist perspective."

The speaker said socialist internationalism was not an abstract ideal but a necessity that arises out of all the pressing issues confronting workers and youth: the danger of nuclear war, global warming and the defence of democratic rights, including the fight to free Assange and Manning, is international in scope.

"The choice facing the working class is not between reform or revolution but revolution or counter-revolution. It can only develop and go forward on the basis of the program of socialist internationalism or it will have another program imposed on it," he said.

All the meeting reports triggered a range of questions and extended discussions. In Sydney, audience members asked about the danger of a US-provoked war

with Iran, as well as the disastrous social conditions facing young people and how to win young people to socialist policies. One audience member angrily denounced the mainstream media and explained why she no longer trusted the media.

In Melbourne, meeting questions also centred on the role of the media and radio "shock jocks" in polluting the political atmosphere. Questions were also asked about the work of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality on universities and campuses. An audience member asked about the differences between the International Committee of the Fourth International and the pseudo-left organisations.

A worker in the Newcastle meeting audience passionately denounced the persecution of Assange and the fabricated sexual assault allegations against him. A question was asked about the Socialist Equality Party's attitude toward the Australian constitution and whether a bill of rights could be established in Australia. This provoked a discussion on the anti-democratic history and character of the capitalist state in Australia and the role of Labor and the unions in the development of nationalist ideology.

A measure of the serious and enthusiastic support for the SEP's analysis was reflected in the Marxist pamphlets and books sold at the meetings and the combined total of more than \$2,600 donated to the party's \$25,000 monthly fund.

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