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Victorian Socialists - <https://victoriansocialists.org.au/>

Candidate for Western Metropolitan Region

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1. What priority are First Nations justice issues for you?

First Nations justice issues are a key priority of mine and Victorian Socialists. Australia is founded on genocide and dispossession. To this day, First Nations people face systematic oppression, discrimination and racism. Australia is a crime scene as Robbie Thorpe, a well-known Gunai/Mara campaigner, puts it. We have a responsibility to organise alongside First Nations activists to challenge injustice.

2. How will you support First Nations people in Footscray / Western Metropolitan Region?

Justice demands that the grievances of First Nations people be addressed, not simply with words, but with deeds.

- Support First Nations led community organising to redress historic and ongoing oppression in Western Metropolitan and across Victoria.
- Support treaties with First Nations peoples that include the right to veto mining and other environmentally and culturally destructive activities. In so doing, achieving justice, sovereignty and self-determination.
- Publicise, attend and mobilise contingents for Invasion Day protests and support the efforts of groups like JAM who are campaigning for Maribyrnong Council to recognise January 26 as Invasion Day/A day of Mourning.
- Oppose the expansion of prisons, like the Dame Phyllis Frost Prison in Ravenhall.
- Campaign for the full implementation of all recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody; oppose punitive bail and parole laws and support the campaign to increase the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14.
- Link up with First Nations activists fighting to protect precious native forests from loggers and sacred sites from developers.
- Campaign for schools to be funded to teach Aboriginal languages and support efforts to further develop the curriculum so that Victorian students are taught about the systemic injustices perpetrated against First Nations people, including in the western metropolitan.
- Campaign to expand the Victorian Stolen Generations Reparations Package to include people removed from their families after 1976 and compensate families of deceased people who would have been eligible for compensation under the scheme.
- Push for implementation of all the findings of the Bringing Them Home report to help stop the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families.

3. What do you believe are the priorities for First Nations people that need to be addressed and how will you do that?

First Nations people have a long and proud history of fighting for justice. There are many priorities (see response to q2) but a key focus for First Nations people has been ending black deaths in custody. In early 2020 Veronica Nelson, a Gunditjmara, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wiradjuri and Yorta Yorta woman died alone in her cell in Dame Phyllis Frost Centre in Ravenhall due to racist neglect. Just this year in August and September two Aboriginal men died in Victoria's prison, including Truginana's Port Phillip Prison. Over 500 First Nations people have been killed in custody since the 1991 Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody. Every death creates trauma for family, friends and the broader Aboriginal community.

First Nations people continue to be incarcerated at disproportionate rates. The fastest growing prison population is Aboriginal women, nearly half of whom are on remand, despite the Royal Commission finding that imprisonment should be a last resort.

We need to implement all of the recommendations of the 1991 Royal Commissions, reform punitive bail and parole laws that have unjustly swelled the prison population, raise the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years and immediately decriminalise public drunkenness. We need to defund police and invest instead in communities to improve access to health, education, legal and other social support. It's also vital that we fight for good health care within the prison system.