

Australian voters speak to WSWS on polling day

Our reporters

26 November 2007

The overwhelming sentiment among people who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* at the polling booths on Saturday was a deeply-felt hostility to the Howard government over a broad range of issues: from its support for the war in Iraq to its imposition of draconian WorkChoices industrial laws, its treatment of immigrants and Aborigines and the continuing deterioration of living standards.

Many explained that they had just voted “to get rid of Howard” or regarded Labor as the “lesser evil”. Others expressed the hope that Labor would not be as bad as the Coalition, but most had no confidence that the new Prime Minister Kevin Rudd would address their needs and concerns. Distrust and skepticism was widespread towards both major parties, their campaigns and their promises as well as towards the establishment media and the narrow range of issues canvassed.

Lody Iorfino, in the seat of Calwell in Melbourne’s northern suburbs, said: “I believe voting is a load of rubbish because the politicians don’t care. They make promises they can’t keep and when they promise something they never tell us all the strings and catches involved. I voted for John Howard last time because I thought the bonus for low-income earners was good but then there were all these hidden catches.

A mother of two school-aged children, she added: “They talk about education but the cost of government schools—books, etc—is now ridiculous. Why don’t they provide free laptops for the poor? They should think before they speak. I don’t need a childcare rebate I need money for the children because children cost a lot more than \$5,000 to raise. The real cost is a hundred thousand. How do you live? Whoever is in government doesn’t put their feet in our shoes. Often I don’t even have enough money to pay for petrol to take the kids to school.”

Mohammed El-Leissy, an IT worker also from Calwell, said: “The most important issue in these elections was the war in Iraq, interest rates, the economy. Firstly, it was an unjust war, the whole idea of weapons of mass destruction, obviously nothing was there. They just followed the Americans and played the lap dogs for the yanks, basically going into another country and becoming occupiers and aggressors, I think was illegal. I think they also went there because they want Israel to be the dominant force in the Middle East. I don’t understand, the US has spent trillions of dollars in Iraq, that would be a huge dent into their economy—wouldn’t that make their situation worse?

“The government needs to pay more attention to our Aboriginal brothers and sisters. In a country like this, and some of the living conditions they’re in, I think it’s disgraceful. They’ll spend millions of dollars in Iraq, but not on these people.

“The standard of living now is becoming much more difficult for the average family to survive. When I speak to people who came here in the 1950s and 1960s they talk about how life was so easy. Now it’s impossible to keep a roof over your head and just buy normal things like food.

“Rudd is a smooth talker, but he has the same rhetoric. I don’t expect much change in terms of social equality, the conditions of Aborigines,

their stance on Iraq. Why did Rudd come out and say he was going to spend less than Howard? I really didn’t understand that. I would think that’s political suicide.”

Kalon Dimecola, a nursing student in the Charlton electorate north of Sydney, said he had voted for Labor. He said the Howard government had proven to be “undemocratic and extremely rightwing”. He had not voted Labor in the past because he felt their policies “lacked substance and the party lacked leadership”. “I am still not fully convinced about Labor but I think that perhaps Labor could do a better job.”

“I became increasingly disgusted with Howard, especially his lying. He will do whatever it takes to stay in power and to take the focus off what is lacking. We had lies over the sackings at Patricks Stevedoring, children overboard and the reasons for war with Iraq.

“I was in Paris at the time and marched in the demonstration there against the Iraq war. The protests around the world were massive. I was shocked when the war went ahead and when the Howard government decided to support it. We all knew it was for oil and that Saddam had largely destroyed his weapons arsenal. People are being killed for nothing.

“I am opposed to Howard’s IR laws because they are aimed at cutting conditions and making people at work very robotic. Labor has promised to get rid of WorkChoices and that is important.” Kalon said he had not studied Labor’s IR platform and was surprised when told it was fundamentally the same as Howard’s.

Ryan, a 35-year-old storeman, voted in Chifley. “I voted Labor. It isn’t like I think there’s much difference between the two but what got me was Howard saying things were going well, that things haven’t been better. You don’t have to look far around where I grew up, where my mum still lives, to see that isn’t true.

“There are people doing it really tough and the government doesn’t give a damn. They are shutting more beds at the Mt Druitt hospital. A lot of people around here are on disability and need proper health care. They don’t get it.

“I’m pretty worried to be honest about the next few years. I don’t think I will be able to afford the mortgage if interest rates keep going up, on top of petrol going up and bills going up. As well, I’m trying to help my mum get by with her medical bills. I hardly go outside my door these days, like to the club or the pub. Just work and pay bills.

“I’m hoping Labor is going to see things get better but you can’t believe anything that governments say these days. Wars are started over lies and election promises are all pretty much lies. If you’re saying the working class needs a new party then I’ll have a look at what you’ve got to say.

Mohammed Nassir, a forklift driver in Calwell said: “We suffered a lot under the Liberals, I think Rudd will make a good change. He will change workers’ conditions. I don’t know a lot about their policies, but we need a change from Howard. I didn’t hear about the refugees, I thought he was going to increase refugee numbers, I thought Rudd was going to look after them. I work as a forklift driver at Coca-Cola. We know Labor is going to

bring more refugees. I thought that Rudd doesn't like war, because he was going to withdraw troops from Iraq.

"I have been working for five years as a casual, and I still don't have permanency. People should be able to get that, but I know they won't give it because they want to be able to get rid of you easily. Interest rates were very important to me as well, to be able to afford a house, because it's very difficult.

Aaron, a market analyst in the seat of Parramatta in Sydney's west, said he voted Labor "simply because I wanted to cast my vote against John Howard and his viewing of us as an economy rather than a society. I believe that's fairly important. The election campaign's been all about the unions this and the unions that, and how it will affect the economy. It's been a scare campaign with nothing about a vision for the future—how to make our society much richer and for families.

"My vote's pretty much been decided by voting for the lesser of two evils. No party directly appealed to me. I also believe that the environment is important. Rudd has no environmental plan for the short term, but maybe for the long-term, whereas Howard has been asleep at the wheel for 11 years."

Asked about the war, he said: "I disagree with it. Australia is an independent nation. The war is more about protecting America's honour. Initially it was about getting hold of the country's natural resources, even though they tried to rosy the whole picture. It was about Iraq's oil—it was not about saving the people—otherwise they would have gone into Zimbabwe, for example, and other countries where there are dictatorships as well.

"It is a very dangerous situation, with Bush talking about a third world war. I am not sure that Bush is actually controlling things, or if he is a puppet for the neo-conservatives that are in his party. I am more scared of the neo-conservative philosophy. Other people are pulling Bush's strings—people like Dick Cheney and Paul Wolfowitz. They've had these plans for controlling the Middle East and the resources for 20-30 years. The Democrats can be compared to Labor, not being the conservative parties, but these parties are scared to stand up for what they believe in. If they don't toe the party line, certain media outlets begin attacking them and they lose their backing."

Although all of the major parties—Liberal, Labor and the Greens—buried the issue of the occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan and US threats of military action against Iran, many people raised their concern.

Mohammed, in the Perth seat of Western Australia, was originally from Lebanon. "This is not a new war. They've been invading the Middle East for over 1,000 years. They say they want peace and freedom for men, women and children but why are they dropping missiles?"

He said that there were no differences between the major parties on all the issues. "They are both the same. One party under two different names. They say in democratic countries the majority should decide and should win but how come 90 percent of the population is poor. A few thousand that are rich, millionaires and billionaires, and the rest struggling. Where is the justice? We need a party that cares for the poor not the rich."

Adam Abel in Calwell, a geologist, said he had been cut off the voting roll after travelling overseas. He was particularly concerned about US militarism. "The situation is worse since they got into Iraq. The excuse into Iran, is about nuclear weapons, but with Musharaff, who is a dictator, it's OK for the US to back them. The only thing he made different is he took off his military suit, but he is a dictator, and the US has supported him. It's because he's an ally who has supported their anti-terror agenda. Like Hussein, he was an ally they could rely on for their policies in Iraq. This is why the US wanted to execute him quickly, because they knew he would talk about how the US had supported him for so long. Bush was really worried about that. That's why I want to join the SEP, because you were the only ones that explained this. With socialism, we don't want communism, but we need to battle against imperialism. Under socialism,

workers will get what they need. We would be able to stop all the evils of the world."

David in Chifley said he had voted for Howard because "I don't want to give Labor the power both in the states and nationally." He said he was opposed to the war in Iraq but didn't think that Labor would make any difference. "Another issue for me was the war in Iraq because I don't think we should have our nose in that war. I think Labor might pull them out sooner than the Liberals but they're already committed so I don't think it would make that much difference. Only the smaller parties are for pulling the troops out immediately."

Other voters were particularly concerned about falling living standards.

Diva Duvaroren, a network specialist in Calwell, said: "I have a mortgage because I bought a house 10 years ago and my payments have increased from \$600 to about \$1,400 a month. This has made a big difference as I'm supporting a daughter and it's very hard for me. I even think about the cost of driving my car, which I never had to worry about before. I don't go out as much.

"The cost of living is not proportional to my pay. Ten years ago I was getting \$600 per week, now I'm only getting \$20 or \$30 more. In comparison to the cost of living this is not much and I'm always in the negative. Child support is a big issue but the government doesn't support people like me and I don't think Labor is going to be better. People want change but they don't realise what they are voting for. They are listening to Rudd but he is not saying how things are going to change."

Pam Johnson, a nurse in Calwell with more than 30 years experience, voted Labor but said she was angry that the state Labor government had used the WorkChoices laws against the Victorian nurses during their recent dispute.

"We tried to achieve a decent wage rise and I hope that we have made some gains. I'm a senior nurse and my wage rise was good but I suspect that the outcome is not good for everyone. I think that this agreement and the productivity deal will come back to bite us on the bum."

Pam said that health had been ignored by Labor and Liberal during the election campaign. "All the parties promised big bikkies but I don't think we are going to see any change. The infrastructure is lacking and there are real problems that are being ignored.

"Nurse training is not good enough and some of the governments' ideas are hair-brained, all they seem interested in is privatisation. It's all right for people with money—they can get the best of care and immediate attention. But if you have no money and have to rely on the public health service you have to wait for years for some procedures. The governments are not interested in long-term solutions but how to cut costs and get elected. For them it's shifting the deck chairs on the Titanic and there are no differences between Liberal and Labor."

Sammy Badri in Calwell said: "The main issues for me were jobs, that people have proper jobs, interest rates and the huge amount of stress on people. Also the war in Iraq, why did Australia have to follow them, the US? The government is making things worse by going to war, spending all our money, making us pay for things like GST. Whoever is coming into government, they have to give us secure jobs. They are making things so bad for people, making us poorer while they go for war. I can see why some people get so angry and want to become terrorists. I don't agree with them, but I can see it's because they're so angry about the situation.

"I work at the Ford factory, Ford is not like before. Here they want to have the contract system, where you have no rights. Can't these government leaders come down and do my job and see how difficult it is? Under Howard, the unions' power has been destroyed, they can't do or say anything now. There have been a lot of changes at Ford, they've told us about the new laws introduced. Relief time has changed, we could have a break when we needed it. If you take too long or too many breaks, the management calls you in and tells you to stop taking so many breaks."

A significant layer particularly of younger voters voted for the Greens to

register their opposition to Labor and the Coalition and out of concern over the environment and the war in Iraq. While many were angry over the policies of the major parties, most had only a sketchy knowledge of the Greens.

Bill Kilner, in the seat of Newcastle north of Sydney, voted Green. “The difference between Kevin Rudd and John Howard is between hot sh.. and cold sh.., no difference. What we need is a radical change in the values in society. I don’t know much about politics but I am savvy enough to know that there is not much difference between Labor and Liberal. Kevin Rudd has even been calling himself an economic conservative and been competing with Howard on that. You could stand here all day rattling off the lies that Howard has told in Office: Children Overboard, Haneef, Iraq..... Whoever, comes into power just seems to fall in line.”

Sam, a young worker, voted in the seat of Melbourne. “I work in hospitality in a café and I’m studying musical engineering. I voted Greens. Definitely the environment is the most important issue. I value the economy but it isn’t more important than people because we live in a society not an economy.

“Considering there are so many people below the poverty line and yet we are told that we are better off than ever—it’s a farce. But I still believe that if someone works hard they should be able to achieve something. I don’t hate capitalism. I don’t believe in the ‘right’ and ‘left’ in politics but I think there needs to be more corporate regulation and some people do need a hand up. People at the top end of the economy seem to get away with anything.

“I think that with the Iraq war they went in there for the money. I know Iran has oil as well. We as a democracy should be holding back these politicians who want to make war.”

Dave, in the seat of Kingsford Smith in Sydney’s eastern suburbs, said he had voted Labor “all my life” but was voting for the Greens in both the lower house and senate for the first time.

“I feel that Labor at the moment isn’t hard enough on climate change. I think you need business, but I think at the moment big business is running things into the ground. Also I’m not interested in the wars they’re fighting—I think its war on truth. I’m hoping [Labor candidate Peter] Garrett gets in rather than the Liberal but the basic thing is that there needs to be a bit of a shake-up. There’s a lot of inequality.

“I don’t like the human rights thing—the fact they can lock people up in prisons without notification. At the moment the only politician I like in the bigger view is [Greens leader] Bob Brown. He’s the only one who stands up, and he stood up against George Bush who I’ve got no time for. I’d prefer it to be like New Zealand, without an alliance to anyone. I think there’s a lot of things done unethically. The stuff that Bush has done with war crimes. I’m just hoping they’ll get the message that we’re sick of them. We’re sick of big business controlling and treating us like slaves.

“And I’m also concerned about what the Liberals have done as far as using this war on truth to rein in people’s rights to protest and disagree. If 99 people see things a certain way, the one person has still got the right to speak up. It doesn’t mean I’m allowed to act violently or do anything else, but I think all this nonsense about being “unAustralian”—I’ve never heard such nonsense, I’m 46 now. It was unAustralian not to protest against leadership. And they’ve had a policy of fear.

“I’ve also been on the butt-end of WorkChoices. I was working at a military base of all places, at the gym and the pool and it was terrible wages. I needed the job because it was very difficult to get it because I’m over 40. I’d taken redundancy and so I needed work. I’m single, but if you were married with kids or you had a lot of responsibilities, it can get

very tough. So at the moment I’m just going to retrain again.

“I don’t believe in ostracising people because of their nationality, religion, sexuality and so on. I think Howard has played off fears for the last seven or eight years. No, everything he’s done is fear-based. I’d rather get back to peace, love and treat people as they’re meant to be. One of my friends was saying that one of the reasons the Americans have to have an external thing [Iraq] is because they’ve got so much trouble in their own country that you’ve got to externalise things and that’s what Hitler did. And why more historians haven’t said more about how much the Howard regime plus Bush’s is run like the Nazi regime, I don’t know. [The Nazis] said it was the Jews, and [Bush and Howard] say it’s the Muslims. It’s to justify taking away civil rights, based on fear.

“So on a positive note, I hope [voters say to] John Howard: ‘Go away. Find something else to do with your life. Do not act as a spokesman for Australia.’ I think it’s the lowest period since the convict era in Australia. It is definitely the lowest. They are the most pathetic human beings that have ever been allowed to rule this country. Totally and utterly pathetic.”

Authorised by N. Beams, 100B Sydenham Rd, Marrickville, NSW

Visit the Socialist Equality Party Election Web Site



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact