

Australian voters speak out—Part 3

“Why are we still in Afghanistan!”

Our reporters
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A wide range of voters spoke to World Socialist Web Site reporters in the course of election day in Australia—August 21. Overwhelmingly, there was a sense of alienation from the two major parties—Labor and Liberal—with significant numbers voting for the Greens, either as a protest vote or in the belief that the party would implement its promises on the environment and extending services such as health and education.

Many voters opposed the June 23-24 political coup within the Labor Party that ousted Kevin Rudd and installed Julia Gillard as prime minister. While unclear as to the reasons, people commonly expressed concerns that it was carried out anti-democratically behind their backs. Some directly blamed the big mining corporations which had mounted a campaign against the Rudd government's plan for a mining super profits tax.

In speaking to the WSWS, voters took the opportunity to express their concerns on a range of issues—from Australian involvement in the Afghan war to the growing hardships they faced—which were ignored by the media and major parties. Below is the third of three articles presenting their views. Other interviews can be read here [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#).

Frank, who voted in the northern Melbourne seat of Calwell, had been unemployed for more than a year. He had previously worked at a caravan factory.

“I did follow the coup against Rudd. I didn't know exactly what it was about, but I thought it was wrong. Everyone makes mistakes, but the way they got rid of him wasn't very good at all. I thought it was likely because his performance wasn't too good, but it could also have been because of the mining companies. I think Labor is better than the Liberals, but I voted for the SEP this time. I really don't think there will be much of a difference whoever [Labor or Liberal] wins—most likely it will still be the same.

“I was retrenched from a factory called Windsor manufacturing in November 2008—30 to 40 were retrenched. There used to be nearly 100 people. Now I'm looking for work. They said it was because of the downturn. It will be hard for me to get a job because I'm 49. The statistics for Broadmeadows it has the highest unemployment for Victoria.

“I think they should fix the mental health system. My brother suffers from bi-polar [disorder]. They have a team that checks up on him, but more should be done. All the young people that don't cope and commit suicide—it's no good.

“Many years ago my brother was shot by the police because he was trying to commit suicide. The police went in there like cowboys and shot at random. We took the police to court and won. We got compensated, but that shouldn't have happened. Since then, many people have been shot. Before charging in there, they should find out if they have any mental illness history.

“My brother was lucky to survive the shootings. I think the worst thing now is he's on his own. At the moment anything can happen. There are many people that have done things and committed suicide, but you don't hear about it.”

Carlos, an IT worker, voted for the SEP in the western Sydney seat of Blaxland. He said he was opposed to the two major parties—Labor and Liberal—and had decided to put them last and second last on the ballot paper. The political coup that removed Kevin Rudd, he said, indicated that there was a “second hand” operating behind the scenes in Australian politics and this was big business and the mining companies.

Jane, who voted in the seat of Gellibrand in the western suburbs of Melbourne, said she had lost her job at Big W after injuring her hand. She was now involved in a contested Workcover claim. Her husband is a truck driver, but without her job they are struggling to make ends meet.

“Who is going to pay our mortgage? I can't work because nobody will put you on, if you've got a previous injury. Workcover won't pay for my operation. Big W won't pay for it. Where am I going to get \$7,000 for an operation on my hand? It has been going on for two years, it is ridiculous! How do you live!

“They [the politicians] are not looking after the people who are working for the country. Nothing is working for us. It is all working against us. Wages don't meet the price of fuel and groceries. You can't have a night out—it's too expensive. Family holidays don't exist. We only go to my mum's when we have enough money to buy fuel.”

Jane was scornful about the official election campaign. “I can’t believe they cover up so much when they talk. Once we’ve voted, we’re nothing again. They could put all their real policies on the Internet and we could read them. But they won’t. They don’t want us to know what they are.”

Her friend Kylie, a single mother, said that paying rent was becoming an increasing burden. “Rent assistance hasn’t gone up in eight years, but rent has gone up heaps. Houses round here are up over \$30 to \$40 a week or even more. Rents around here used to be \$260, now they’re even \$320.”

Jane added: “They need to look after the little people. But no, the rich are getting rich, the poor are getting poorer. They [the politicians] don’t want to hear it. They set their policies and impose them on the working class. They hold back on the stuff they don’t want us to know and then they impose it anyhow. That is what gets our back up. There is nothing about what society needs, it is all about the bottom dollar. If either party gets in, either way we are going to get screwed. You don’t have much of an option.”

Sanah, a childcare worker, who voted in Blaxland, opposed the dismissal of Rudd. “This was for the mining companies, who now seem to be running the country. What’s the point of voting when they can do this?”

“This doesn’t mean that I agree with Labor though. Why are we still in Afghanistan? We hoped things might be different with Labor being the government in 2007 but nothing changed, nothing at all. More troops get killed, and innocent Afghan people, every day.

“Why can’t people like you [the SEP] get more publicity? All we ever hear about is Liberal and Labor and they’ve got nothing to do with us.”

Rob, a Qantas maintenance engineer, voted in Gellibrand. He had received an SEP manifesto in his letterbox, considered its policies carefully and placed the SEP second when he voted.

Rob explained that at the airbase at Avalon airport, the number of workers was down to 700 from 1,000. He said they did heavy maintenance work on all the 747s in the Qantas international fleet, which are mainly older aircraft. He was critical of the continual drive for greater productivity, saying that the employees’ lives suffered as a result of pressure and stress to ensure aircraft safety was not compromised.

He spoke of Prime Minister Gillard with contempt. “She is nothing but a puppet. I would never vote for a big party. I was thinking of voting Green but a friend of mine is a councillor in local government. When I said I was thinking of voting for them, he told me they say one thing and do another. So I decided against them. I wanted to vote for somebody independent.”

Cheryl, a retired secondary school teacher, voted in Calwell. “I’ve been following the campaign avidly. I’ve been tuning in to Radio National and “Lateline”. You see in the media there’s always a bias to Liberal. I’ve been Labor all my life. I’ve been a militant unionist. The mining companies hold the government to ransom. It was a good [super profits] tax.”

At the same time, Cheryl did not agree with the policies introduced by Gillard as education minister—in particular, the use of standardised testing to grade schools on the government’s MySchool web site.

“Julia [Gillard] lost the plot on the MySchool web site.” she said. “Most educators are aware of the harm [of grading] more than the good. It’s really the idea of league tables [for schools]. It makes it hard for schools that struggle. There’s too much stigma. If it was just information about schools, then okay. And Julia dropped the ball on the [school] funding model. It’s extended until 2014. Non-government schools get 70 percent of federal funding.”

Steve, a labourer in the construction industry, voted in the eastern Sydney seat of Kingsford Smith. Disgusted with the election, he said: “They [Labor and Liberal] are only interested in showing us the shiny side.” He also said he was angry at the way Rudd was deposed. “There’s got to be a pay-off for knifing Rudd in the back, and that’s the decision to scrap the mining tax. What Gillard has handed over is worth billions [to the mining corporations]. These miners are rolling in it.

“I read that Clive Palmer, the mining boss in Queensland, just bought his daughter a \$5 million cabin cruiser for her 21st birthday. But look at me. I work 7 days a week so I can pay my rent. If you’re just an average working person today, you’re just fighting to survive. Things have got worse. For example, my electricity bill’s gone up 80 percent in the last 18 months. I don’t use more electricity, but it costs that much more. There’s no reason that someone like Palmer should get paid so much more than me.

“If you had a system where everybody was looked after and got a house and you didn’t have to fight for everything, *then* you might get a democratic society. It would be communism run differently—a democratic communism. That would be good!”

The authors also recommend:

Voters speak to the WSWS on election day
[23 August 2010]

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