

Victorian workers discuss key issues in state election

“The economy is in chaos and we’re being made to pay”

Our reporters

30 November 2010

Voters spoke with World Socialist Web Site reporters on a range of issues outside polling booths in the Broadmeadows electorate on Saturday. Socialist Equality Party candidate Peter Byrne contested the seat in the Victorian state election.

A key manufacturing centre, Broadmeadows has been devastated by job cuts in the past five years and now has the state’s highest official unemployment rate—15.9 percent or almost three times the state average—and over 50 percent youth unemployment. While the electorate was considered a “safe Labor seat”, it recorded a 10.7 percent swing against the state Labor government of Premier John Brumby on Saturday.

Voters angrily denounced the government over rising unemployment, inadequate housing, poor health and education facilities and the ongoing Australian involvement in the US-led occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. Part 1 of the interviews was posted on November 29.

Chris, who is in his early 60s and on a disability pension, said this was the first time he had voted for the Greens.

“As far as I’m concerned all the big parties are liars, especially Liberal and Labor. The problem with backing the Greens though, is their votes go to Liberal or Labor. I know it pretty much ends up being a donkey vote, but I’m pretty sure that a lot of people will vote Green here because of all the hardship that’s happening.

“For young people there’s no decent future. All that the companies offer is part-time and casual work, which they love because they can get rid of you any time.

“I worked in the textile industry for about 20 years and from there I went into transport. I’m on a disability pension at the moment, which is around \$650 a fortnight. It sounds like a lot for doing nothing, but it isn’t. The bills keep pouring in—electricity, gas, rates and everything else—and I’ve got a kid at home and it’s really not easy. I don’t have any answers, I’m not political, but I know something is very wrong and something has to be done. But who can do it? You can’t trust any of them.”

Tom, who emigrated from the UK more than 30 years ago, has a full-time job in warehousing. “I don’t really think the politicians care about people,” he said. “After they’re elected they just kick back and settle in. Labor is no longer the working man’s party,

which I thought it was, but has become more conservative in its ideals.

“With the demise of the manufacturing industry here, we’ve also seen the demise of the unions. The gap between rich and poor is wider. It’s harder to get a job, and a home, and it’s becoming a more cut-throat society,” he added.

“I thought things would be better when Blair came to power in the UK, but look at what happened. He followed Bush to the war, even though people didn’t want it. Now the situation is even worse, with the Conservatives cutting everything and saying it’s in the country’s ‘best interests’. And it’s a total breakdown in Ireland. We were told for years how great the Irish economy was.”

Ilker, a student at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology’s city campus, was concerned about school closures and youth unemployment: “They completely stuffed up the system when they amalgamated schools in this area from 17 to 11. They kept telling us it would change [for the better] but it’s the same kids bunched into these massive schools and with the same social problems.

“Within two years of pushing them into these bigger schools, there were all sorts of problems. Every day outside Gladstone Park School there would be a cop car to deal with possible fights. But the police don’t help, they actually make things worse. Most of those who finished high school with us weren’t able to go to uni like us, and they’re unemployed or working casual. But they should have better opportunities. With the industry shutting down, you can’t get any decent jobs here.

Sandy, a single mother, told us: “Everything keeps getting worse for ordinary people. My father was a rusted-on Labor man but I don’t like any of them. I don’t believe them. Labor has no strategies in place to help ordinary people.

“The education system is a debacle and so is health. Look at all the empty factories around here and my old school—Upfield High—is in ruins; it’s just an abandoned building. Children are pushed through the education system like sausages, but there are no jobs.

“Children with disabilities are simply regarded as an annoyance. My son, who turns 20 in January, has Asperger’s syndrome and virtually nothing was done to help. One teacher called him a

mummy's boy; that sent him into a complete spin and now he's a virtual recluse.

"I was a patient service assistant in Sunshine but was injured on the job five years ago and can't work. I've been fighting for compensation since then and my claim will finally go to court in July next year. I'm trying to live on a carer's pension, but it's becoming impossible with the increases in water and other utility bills. My electricity has gone up by \$300 a quarter. How am I supposed to pay that?" she asked.

Onker, an engineer from India, has lived in Australia for the past 10 years. "This is the first time I've changed my vote. I usually support Labor and I voted for them in the federal election," he said.

Commenting on the June 23-24 backroom coup that removed Kevin Rudd as prime minister to make way for Julia Gillard, he said: "I didn't agree with the removal of Rudd—this should not have happened—so I had to vote for Julia. But I was not happy about it. I voted against them this time in the state elections because of what happened with Rudd, just to even it out a bit.

"There are higher people up there making the decisions and manipulating the ropes. This sort of thing happens in my country, but I didn't believe it would happen here. This is very sad," he said.

"Labor has been in for over 10 years and look what they have stuffed up—the Myki transport ticketing system, solar panels and a list of other things. Everything is about business. And look at what has happened at the desal[ination] plant, with the company spying on workers. It's not clear who you can trust anymore."

Evelyn, originally from El Salvador, said: "I am a full-time mum with six children and my husband has been looking for work for the last six months. He's looking for a truck-driving job and has been applying every day.

"A big issue for me is public housing. I was renting a private house and the owners decided to put it up for sale. I have many kids and was really desperate, so I went to the government agency that was supposed to assist, but there was no help. You have to be on the streets with your kids before they pay any attention ... It's ridiculous because the rates are going up, which puts pressure on the owners, who put pressure on renters."

Evelyn has been on the public housing waiting list for three years. She has been told that waiting time is about seven years.

Maha, originally from Lebanon, is married with three children: "We want parties to keep their word. Labor promises us things but we're getting nowhere with them. We vote for these people, but they tell lies."

Maha voted Labor in the last federal election but decided to vote Liberal in the state election. "I was so disappointed about what happened to Rudd—the way they did it was really ugly and it shows that there is no sense of decency," she said.

Kemal has a painting business with a small number of employees. He previously worked for an international food processing company and became active in the Australian

Manufacturing Workers Union. He was hired as a union organiser but quit in 2006, he said, because "the union did not really support the workers." He said that the Liberal and Labor parties "are not much good".

Kemal had tried to ignore the problems created by the global financial crisis. "But the rise of the Australian dollar," he admitted, "will kill exports and then there will be a huge crash, especially in the housing market. There are hundreds of thousands of dollars in house prices that are unreal."

Seff and his wife emigrated from Turkey in the late 1980s. They both worked at Ford Plastics for almost 20 years. Seff was a union delegate for a few years, but became disillusioned with the company and union collaboration. He said the union was "the police" at Ford.

"I am concerned about the hospitals, health issues and education," he said. "You have to wait hours and hours in emergency. They give you some tablets and you wait. I don't think any of the parties are going to fix this issue; they don't even try," he said.

Seff's daughter studies and also works at the airport. "They ring her anytime—even in the middle of the night—just for two or three hours, Seff said. "All jobs are becoming causal and we're worried about the future for young people."

Jose, originally from El Salvador, resigned from the Labor Party five years ago. He said he had emailed the ALP last week to protest its right-wing policies. He voted for the Greens in the federal election and did so again in the state election.

"I was disgusted with the way they sacked Rudd. This was wrong and completely undemocratic. Julia Gillard just stabbed him in the back and it was all because the mining companies didn't agree with being taxed. I also told them that I didn't agree with them bailing out the banks. It was unbelievable for them to be given millions and millions of dollars. Labor never replied to my email, but yesterday I got a phone call from Mr. Brumby's local election office. I told them I didn't want to speak to them."

Asked about the austerity measures in Greece, Spain, Portugal and Ireland, he said: "The economic system is in chaos and the ordinary people are being made to pay. This is wrong. Maybe at the next election I will vote for the socialists."



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact