"I don't think anyone really represents the people"

NSW voters speak out against Labor—Part two

Our reporters
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Voters spoke to World Socialist Web Site *reporters outside polling booths in the electorates of Auburn, Bankstown, Marrickville and Newcastle, where the Socialist Equality Party stood candidates on March 26. The overwhelming anger and distrust of Labor—state and federal—produced a landslide defeat of the New South Wales state government. This is the second of two articles exploring some of the reasons why hundreds of thousands of ordinary people rejected any vote for Labor.*

Numbers of voters voiced their opposition to the federal Labor government's enthusiastic backing of the US-led bombardment of Libya. Apart from the Socialist Equality Party, the unprovoked military assault initiated by the US, France and Britain was studiously ignored by all other parties contesting the New South Wales state election.

Those interviewed bluntly rejected Australian government and media claims that the attack on Libya was motivated by democratic or humanitarian concerns. University of New South Wales student Farid immediately responded: "It's absolutely not for humanitarian reasons but broader economic questions. It's quite obvious—it's blatantly obvious—that this is about oil and the strategic position of Libya."

Mohammed Sesay, originally from Sierra Leone, denounced the military assault. "The bombing of Libya is no good," he said. "Every time this happens in Africa, the bombing and the war lasts ten years. It doesn't stop. They say it's for democracy in Libya but if they really wanted to bring democracy, they wouldn't be doing it with violence."

Zena, a personal secretary who is studying secondary teaching at Macquarie University, said the so-called no-fly zone was for the US to "secure power in Libya. They don't care about the Libyan people but have a hidden agenda. They go on and on about terrorist attacks in Iraq and Afghanistan and all that, but this is false. It's just an excuse to get into areas that have oil."

Cem, a carpenter from Auburn, said the attack on Libya was "a repeat of what happened many years ago in Iraq". He also denounced Labor's mandatory detention of asylum seekers. "Legal, illegal refugees, there is no such thing. A refugee is a refugee, whether they are political, or religious," he said.

"Keeping men, women and children in centres, year after year, is sad and it's criminal. We have an obligation to take in refugees, and so does every other country, and it's no different whether they come by boat or aeroplane. If they have crossed the seas in a bloody dinghy, they've got a reason," he said.

Many of those who spoke to WSWS reporters refused to vote Labor because of its attacks on their living standards and public education, and the plight of students.

Monica, a masters degree student from Bankstown, said: "I study full-time and can only work one day a week. This work is supposed to provide for my books but it really means I don't have money for anything else.

"The classes are packed with students, I'm paying thousands of dollars for face-to-face teaching and yet some of the lessons are online. I'm trying to make a

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difference in society by becoming a teacher and yet we get no support from the government."

Monica denounced the federal Labor government's *My School* web site, which ranks schools using data obtained from the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests. Introduced by Julia Gillard, when she was education minister, the policy pits schools and teachers against each another, encouraging a further shift of students from public to private schools, and entrenching a two-tier education system.

"NAPLAN will cut most of the curriculum and force teachers to teach to the test and not to the children's' abilities," Monica explained. "The SEP's policy is good because it's concerned about the well-being and education of children, as well as the situation facing university students. I also agree with your policy of free education—that's worth fighting for."

Sandra Veljanovski, a creative and performing arts teacher from Marrickville, also criticised Labor's education policies. "NAPLAN is real stress because it forces teachers to teach to the test rather than providing a well-rounded curriculum," she said. "This impacts on the national curriculum means that, being a creative arts teacher, I could lose my job.

"It's heartbreaking because right now everything is being stripped back ... They're pitting schools that have nothing and students that come from nothing, against students that have all of the luxuries in life … And then they're shocked to see the result.

"The government keeps looking at turning public schools into private entities. We need people to come out and say that this is not on, and that it can't happen. I don't think anyone really represents the people anymore."

Margaret Benson and her daughter Candice from Bankstown denounced the federal government's attacks on welfare recipients.

"Gillard wouldn't know what it's like to be poor," Margaret said. "I've been sick—I've had a stroke and heart problems—and so I'm on the DSP [Disability Support Pension]. But if Gillard starts cutting it like she says, then you're going to see a lot of old people just living on a bit of dry bread every day.

"Our governments are totally unaccountable. The electrical power sell-off was organised behind everyone's backs and then Labor shut down parliament so that no one could find out what they did."

Candice, who left school when she was 17, voiced her concerns about unemployment, low wages and other social problems impacting on young people in Sydney's western suburbs. "There are no full-time jobs here," she said. "If you're unskilled, the only thing available is basically in retail, and that's at the minimum wage.

"What is the future available to us now?" Candice asked. "It's a future in which no one will be able to own their own house, unless they are multi-millionaires. People will be renting for the rest of their lives, and will not be able to afford to look after their children or care for them."

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