

Australian voters speak out against establishment parties

Our reporters

12 September 2013

World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke with workers, students, youth, retirees, welfare recipients and immigrants outside polling booths during last Saturday's federal election. In this article—the last in a series—voters explained why they did not vote for the major political parties—Labor, the Coalition and the Greens.

Last week's election highlighted the vast gulf between the aspirations of millions of ordinary people and the parties of the political establishment.

Many voters abstained or spoiled their ballot papers. Tens of thousands supported “other” parties, whose preference votes flowed on to an array of right-wing and nationalist groups. Others, however, voted consciously for the SEP as a genuine socialist alternative.

At the Greenacre polling booth in southwest Sydney, **Akim** said he was disgusted with Labor. “Labor was elected and Kevin Rudd put in. He was taken out [as prime minister] and Julia Gillard came in, without us choosing her. Then it went from Gillard back to Rudd,” he said. “Who chose that? Is that democracy?”

David, a pallet machine operator from Dandenong in Melbourne and a long-time Labor voter, supported the Sex Party. When asked why, he replied: “Labor says one thing and does another. Julia Gillard, for example, said she was not going to impose a carbon tax but within a month had done it. Labor said they would get rid of Howard's WorkChoices [industrial relations laws] but nothing changed. It's just got worse.

“If you don't have two people working in the family you can't survive. Bills are going up, everything's going up, but our wages aren't going up. The average man is dying. Workers don't get a say in anything.”

Harry, a barista from Newcastle, said he supported Julian Assange's WikiLeaks Party in the Senate “because I believe in freedom of information. The public has the right to know.” He refused to vote for any of the parties in the lower house because “they just outright lie” and “don't care about the problems of ordinary people, only about the wealthy and big business. This has resulted in greater levels of social inequality and every day the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.”

TAFE student **Madeleine** said she “did not see any point in voting” and disagreed with the entire process. “Whoever you

vote for, it's always going to be Labor or Liberal. Both promise you all the things in the world but when it gets down to it, both carry out the same policies.”

She explained how budget cuts had impacted on her education: “I'm doing my HSC equivalency and some of the best teachers had their times cut and couldn't teach the classes I wanted to do. Lots of arts courses have been cut as well, which I feel are very important to education, for your creative outlet. Arts and culture bring a community together, which is what we need.”

Terry, an Alcoa worker from Geelong, said he rejected the major parties and was “not sure” about the Greens. “I've been at Alcoa for 30-odd years. It was a good place to work. It's been tightened down with less and less people doing more and more work. Geelong is not in a good place...”

“The Labor Party has edged closer and closer to the Liberal Party. They've both moved more and more to the right and they defend the rich... [Former Labor Prime Minister] Bob Hawke started the trend of buddying up to the rich people. The people on the street are the ones that do all the work and pay all the taxes. The bigger the companies, the less tax they pay. That's the way the governments seem to like it to be...”

“I'm for socialism in a more modernised way,” he added. “I'm not sure what that way is, but I've always had the view that the people should have more say and more rights than what goes on.”

Adelaide hospital worker **Carole** supported the right-wing Palmer United Party. “It's time for a third party in this country,” she said. “If he [the billionaire Clive Palmer] brings some of that wealth and brings jobs to this country, it would be good. Someone's got to do better than Liberal and Labor; they're useless. I know he'll stick up for the money people, the Liberals, but we just need somebody with new ideas...”

“I've been a Labor voter all my life. It's the first time I've not voted Labor. I'm just sick of the fighting, sick of the bickering they do. They all lie and do not care about the ordinary people. Unless you've got money in this country, nobody cares about you,” she said. Carole said she would read the SEP's program.

These comments reflect some of the widespread political confusion. A small but important layer of workers and youth

voted for the SEP. For many, the election was their first encounter with the party.

Rachael, a Newcastle University philosophy and religion student, said she studied the policies of all the political parties and decided to vote SEP. “The other parties are run by big business and get lots of money from them. I like the way the SEP divided its preferences between the other parties so there is no advantage to any of them. Liberals want to privatise everything—hospitals, public schools, electricity and every public service. Labor has torn itself from its roots and become more and more big business orientated.”

Mark, a waste industry driver from Dandenong, voted for the SEP because Labor, Liberal and the Greens were “all the same and don’t do anything for me... I get paid less in real terms than I did 10 years ago and work more hours and under worse conditions,” adding “health and safety is ignored by companies.”

Mark explained that he had been sacked a year ago “for taking a Saturday off for family reasons, and to simply recover from long hours of work... Things are looking worse into the future, especially job security or even a job for the next generation. I want to learn more about the SEP.”

Mehrdad, from Mascot in Sydney, said: “I voted for the SEP because I think your party has the best platform compared to other parties. You want a fundamental change; you want to change from the roots, not just some reforms which don’t fix anything, like giving workers a one dollar pay increase and then increasing other items. I think the SEP is fighting to bring a better life for working class people.”

In Brisbane, **Shahed** explained why he voted for the SEP: “When I came to Australia in 2006 I wanted to see a society in which the general people, especially the workers, are really honoured. But my observation is that things are going down and down, and that people are not properly treated. Instead this society is becoming one of the bankers and the capitalist people, who are going up too much. That is why I support this kind of party. It epitomises this kind of view.” Shahed agreed “100 percent” with the need for a workers’ government, commenting: “Workers’ interests must be the priority.”

In Melbourne, **Jamie** handed out SEP how-to-vote cards. He said: “I am very annoyed at how we are going to war because I come from a country, Chile, where we saw what happened when the US intervened. They gave money to the right wing to cause the [1973] coup.

“I’m annoyed with what is happening in Australia because we are losing a lot of rights and I see people living in the street with blankets in this city. I’m a pensioner and if I didn’t live in the Housing Commission place, I wouldn’t be able to pay the rent.

“Why do they spend money for the army, but they don’t have money for schools and hospitals? They have the money to go to Afghanistan and Iraq. The public hospitals are a mess, it’s crazy. I’m very clear about what is happening—the SEP is the

only party that says what is going on with the war and the economy.”

In Marrickville, Sydney, **Paul** a semi-retired filmmaker, voted for the SEP. He said the election campaign was “farcical” because it “excludes the interests of the population... I voted for the SEP because I think there’s hope that we aren’t going to be caught up in a game of ping-pong where all they’re doing is competing for trophies.

“They talk about ‘cutting,’ but what right do they have to cut? I think there should be a policy of sharing and that money is available to everyone equally... We put the politicians in government for what? To be abused by them? To be told there is going to be cuts; that the education and health services are going to be lesser than what they used to be? No, it’s all wrong.”

Also in Marrickville, music student **Gina**, 19, who voted SEP, said life had become “unbearable” for many young people. “You’re told that you have to get an amazing mark in your HSC. You’re told that there’s no hope at getting a job and if you get an apprenticeship or a traineeship, you’re getting paid nothing. You can’t afford to live out of home anymore... I don’t think youth know what to do. They don’t know where to turn for help or guidance or a proper solution, so they look for it in the usual addictive substances...”

“I’ve heard it said a lot that great change comes out of desperation and I think the world is getting really desperate for change. Capitalism is crumbling around us. It’s proving to be a failing system and as a society we’re repeating the same mistakes...”

“I voted for the SEP because I believe in its program. It gives me hope that we’re not going to be stuck in this [system] forever, but we’ve got to fight for it [socialism]. I love nothing more than the idea of people coming together to make a conscious decision to change the world. This is a beautiful thing, but it requires unity in struggle. No matter where you are in the world, we all face the same situation under capitalism.”



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