

# Liverpool residents condemn Australia's growing social divide

Our reporters  
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WSWS reporters asked a range of people in Liverpool's shopping mall to comment on the social chasm between Mosman and Liverpool, respectively one of Sydney's richest and poorest areas (see: "Australia: Glaring social inequality in Sydney").

**Johnnie**, a former factory worker and bus driver who now receives a disability carer's payment to look after his ill wife, said: "I don't like what the government is doing because the rich people are just greedy. The government is cutting down the low-income workers and the pensioners, and the money is going to the rich, rather than fixing the problems we have in our community."

Originally from the Cook Islands in the South Pacific, Johnnie spoke about the difficulties confronting workers and pensioners. "Many pensioners are panicking because the prices keep going up, and they can't live. Because we live in a Housing Department place, our rent is not so high but everything keeps going up. After paying our bills and rent, we usually have only \$10 left a fortnight, and then we have to try to help our kids and so on."

Johnnie, who is also a guitar-playing musician, was scathing about the record of both Labor and Liberal governments. "All these politicians, they earn so much more money than us, even after they retire, as well as getting free cars and everything. They should be helping those in need. Now they are trying to push people off the disability pension, even though companies won't hire people over 50, and they want to put up the retirement age."

**Jose** had noticed a great change in Australia since he arrived from the Philippines in 1992. Retrenched by ANZ Bank, he was unemployed for six months before starting a courier business, and now takes home only about \$700 a week.

"ANZ Bank is one of the biggest companies making people redundant," Jose said. "That's where all the money is going. They are very rich people. Even though they are making profits and the executives are making millions every year, they are removing the people."

"I left the Philippines because I saw the big gap between the rich and poor," Jose explained. "When I arrived, Australia was the best country. I thought this was paradise. One dollar could buy a lot of things. We used to pay \$60 for three months for electricity; now it is about \$700. It's ridiculous. Everything is going up—food, fuel, fares. Now I see so many poor Australians."

Jose commented: "As a courier driver, I can see the people dressing very differently and having a different lifestyle in areas like Mosman. The houses, the dress, are nicer. Why is this like that?"

**Brian**, who completed high school last year, said there was a marked difference between the facilities in wealthy private schools and those in government schools like the one he attended. "If all the schools received equal funding, it would improve everyone's standards, produce better attendance and probably a better world," he suggested.

"There's a massive gap already between the rich and poor, and it's only going to widen further unless we do something about it," Brian said. "There's not much difference between the two parties. How we elected Abbott, it was sort of like a 'better of two evils,' although in the end it's all going downhill."

**Sam**, a retired Aboriginal worker, was angry about the disparity in Australia. He stated: "We are pushed by the government to look at the economy as number 1, but there are social issues they ignore, like people who don't have a home, and the plight of refugees."

Australian politicians, and particularly the media, blind the public to the facts.”

Sam was concerned about the state of public housing. “The place where I have lived for three years has carpet that I believe hasn’t been changed since the 1970s. There are all kinds of things in it, like scabies. They don’t do any maintenance; it’s like a building which doesn’t exist on council files. They just collect rent.”

Now on an aged pension, Sam said it was “far better than when I was on unemployment benefits.” He explained: “Unemployment benefits are absolutely atrocious and you can become so easily stagnated.”

The retired worker denounced the soaring cost of living. “In the 60s and 70s a little bit of money bought a lot more than it does now,” he said. “When I was 16 or 17, you could go get a job, rent a place, feed yourself properly, get to work, buy some clothes and go out 2 or 3 times a week if you were careful with your money. You can’t do that now.”

Sam expressed his frustration with the political system and the major parties, explaining: “I stopped voting a lot of years ago because there was no candidate I felt confident in. If I do vote without feeling confident, then I’m just donkey voting.”

**Jodie**, a young naturopath working in an integrated medical practice, expressed disgust at the inequalities in the health care available to people in Sydney’s western suburbs compared to areas like Mosman. “People come to my clinic saying how badly they’re treated already, and also there are not enough nurses for patients in the hospitals. You have four to five patients per nurse, even for new-born babies. It’s just ridiculous. And I have friends who have just finished studying nursing and they can’t get jobs. We need more nurses, but we are being told there’s no funding.

“Because I work on the north shore, I see the differences. I was working in a colonic clinic for quite some time and saw people have to pay ridiculous amounts just to relieve their bowel and constipation problems, because they couldn’t get that support in the hospitals. But many people, for instance pensioners, can’t afford these treatments, and they’re the ones who need them the most. Everyone should be entitled to proper treatment.”

Jodie explained: “I grew up in the west but I work on the north shore, because these are the only people who can afford natural health facilities. Out here, people

can’t afford the treatments, and when they are poor, the first things they give up are their medications. They’ll put off their medications so they can buy food.”

Jodie was incensed by reports that the federal government’s Audit Commission is considering plans to charge patients a \$5 or \$6 upfront fee to see a doctor under the Medicare health insurance system. “We’re going to have a lot of sick people, because people are not going to be able to pay that, not around here. In Mosman, it won’t faze them, but here people won’t pay \$5 to see a doctor. They will clog up the emergency wards of Liverpool and Campbelltown hospitals because they will leave their health concerns to the last minute.”

Jodie commented: “There’s going to be a huge backlash. That’s why they’re keeping the Audit Commission report a secret. They’re hiding something.”

Six years after completing a four-year health sciences degree, Jodie was still paying off a \$70,000 HECS fee debt. “Sometimes I think the main political parties are just corporations fighting for power, only interested in supporting big business,” she said. “The rich have friends in high places; that’s all I can say...It makes no difference whether it’s a Labor or Liberal government, because when it comes down to it, it’s all run by the corporations, like the mining companies. I’ve never seen any great change from either party.”



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