

WSWS speaks with workers and youth about Australian budget

Our reporters
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Anger is mounting as more details emerge about the social impact of the Abbott government's federal budget, handed down last Tuesday. *World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke with a range of people about the cuts to education and healthcare services, welfare, aged-pensions and jobs. Today's interviews come from Sydney, with more from Melbourne to be published tomorrow.

Simon, a public health system doctor, said he decided to attend an anti-budget protest in Sydney because "we have to stand up for ourselves."

"I'm sick of the incredibly right-wing government we've got," he continued, "and the ones we've had before, who refuse to prioritise health and education as the two most important things for our society ... I've absolutely no confidence in Labor. They started most of these heinous cuts and the Liberals are just the logical continuation of that.

"As a doctor I'd be ashamed to work in a society and a health system that no longer looks after people who can't afford to pay their way. The vast majority of our patients can't pay for any of their tests, let alone doctor's visits ... The long-term outcome will be greater costs to them, their families and indeed, our society.

"I blame the Labor government for the Abbott government. Without their spineless, craven cuts to things that most people hold dear, an Abbott government would never have come to pass. No one wanted to vote for Labor because they were as much a friend of big business as Abbott wants to be."

Interviewed in the Sydney suburb of Parramatta, **Adele**, 64 and unemployed, denounced the cuts to youth welfare. "They are cutting poor people off life-support," she said. "Young people are going to be desperate and get into all sorts of crime and other things to get money. You can't blame them. We've got

to exist in some way, haven't we?"

Responding to Treasurer Joe Hockey's declaration that the "age of entitlement" is over, she said: "That angers me so much. It is rubbish and I'll tell you why: the jobs aren't there; people have got no other avenues. I go every Monday to Breakthrough [a job network] but it's useless. I keep thinking, 'I won't do it,' 'I won't bother anymore,' but keep going just in case. They say there's \$10,000 they're going to give employers for hiring older workers but that doesn't make any difference because the jobs are not there."

D'Artagnan, 50, an ex-warehouse manager in Parramatta, was scathing about the new retirement age of 70. "I'm 50 years old, and I have lots of medical problems," he said. "Centrelink still wants me to work but I can't find work. As for a 70-year-old—who'll get a job at that kind of age? It's stupid."

Most Australians, D'Artagnan continued, were living at poverty levels. "It's alright if your name is James Packer [a billionaire casino owner] and all these stupid politicians who are very rich, but not for us ... This is not the Australia that I knew. When I came to this country 27 years ago, I thought this was a great country but it's going down the gurgler."

Tony, a pensioner from Millers Point, is one of more than 200 public housing tenants to be evicted from their inner Sydney homes in the next two years. The budget "is definitely not for the working people," he said. "It's just the beginning and something much bigger than just a budget.

Tony added: "There's something going on behind the scenes. It reminds me of the people in Europe in the lead up to the last world war. I think some of them intuitively felt that something bad was coming and this budget feels the same.

"Young people will be made to feel like they're

failing because they'll be starving and not paying their rent. They'll be homeless and that, in turn, will give everyone the right to point at them and say 'look at them, they're useless.'"

Natasha, a single mother from Wollongong with a two-year-old daughter, explained that her income would probably be reduced by about \$100 a week.

"If I'm working all my payments get cut, so it's really, really hard. It's very difficult to find childcare in Australia and keep a job. After paying my rent, I have about \$250 a week to live on and then I've got electricity, food, all my other payments."

Natasha said she was "completely against the war in Afghanistan," which she described as a "war for America." She also opposed the Australian government's brutal treatment of asylum seekers. "I completely agree with them coming to Australia. These are people from disadvantaged countries: at risk of being raped or stepping on landmines. These are desperate people in desperate situations. All they want to do is save their families and have a better life for themselves."

Rowena, 30, a community support worker for the intellectually disabled from Sydney's Mascot, said: "I don't think [the budget] serves a practical purpose to anyone other than those in big business. It does not help the people that make up Australia."

"If somebody has lost their job or moved out of home how they are going to afford to get by the next six months? If someone has an ordinary retail job, how are they meant to save money to support themselves through this? I have no idea how [the government] thinks that can possibly work or be of benefit to anyone

...

"Where are we going? It worries me. Are we going to turn into some society with a huge gap between socio-economic statuses? The rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer. Capitalism exists on that gap and it's just widening."



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