

Students denounce budget at Day of Action rallies

An IYSSE reporting team
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) interviewed students at yesterday's rallies in Sydney and Melbourne against the Abbott government's budget, seeking their views about its implications for students and the working class (see: "Australian students protest against Abbott government's budget"). IYSSE members and supporters also distributed copies of an IYSSE statement, "A socialist perspective to fight Abbott's budget."

Haneen, a Bachelor of Political and International Relations student at Notre Dame University, said: "I'm from Mount Druitt in the western suburbs [of Sydney], so these budget cuts will affect us immensely. A lot of people there are on low incomes and many already don't have the opportunity to go to university. This will make it even harder. I have two disabled brothers and my mother's carer payments are going to be cut.

"I will probably graduate with a huge debt. Who knows how much—perhaps \$80,000 or \$90,000? I work, but it's hard to get a job now, especially in the western suburbs. If you don't have a job, how are you supposed to get money? These cuts will only cause more crime.

"You're right. The working class really does need its own party. This protest is good, but we need something more permanent."

Richard, 27, a Macquarie University student, said the deregulation of fees is part of the "increased commercialisation of universities over the last 20 years, whether under Labor or Liberal. Students will end up with massive debts and they will have to work low-paid jobs to pay it off. The only viable jobs seem to be in the financial sector. If you want to become journalist or something, it is very hard to enter the field."

Commenting on the rally organisers, Richard said: "I can't help but think they're backed by Labor and

Greens. When young people don't have a future, they turn to Labor and Greens but when you look at the big picture they're actually part of the problem. I think Labor actually introduced some of the cuts that the Liberals implemented. Tony Abbott isn't the only one. Young people should be made conscious of that.

"Education cuts are reflections of the whole capitalist system, which isn't limited to one country but is spread out across the whole globe. If we're going to look for solutions, we have to analyse the world as a whole to see what is happening."

Farah, a Tertiary and Further Education (TAFE) student from Iran, attended the rally with her 90-year-old mother. "I'm here to support the people," she said. "This budget is hurting people on disability, pensioners, workers, the whole nation.

"The rich people get richer, and the poor people get poorer. When everything went wrong with the global economy, Australia was okay. Now they are using the crisis and this budget for their own interests, not for the people. It's not just Tony Abbott. There are people behind this program.

"I'm a TAFE student and a disability pensioner. They will cut TAFE. They are talking about making people pay for Medicare. What about the prescriptions I have to buy? What about rent and electricity? I'm not rich enough to pay for all of this."

Kostas, in his early 20s and also a TAFE student, said: "I've come because I disagree with the deregulation of universities. This is going to massively increase fees. As a TAFE student, I feel that the growing privatisation of TAFE is going to make it very difficult for people to get an education.

"They [the government] don't want to subsidise it anymore, they just want to profit from it. They're not prioritising education, just corporate interests. They're

creating a class system that will mean even upper middle-class people might not get an education, and only the very wealthy will go to university.

“Tony Abbott used the word ‘austerity.’ I think they’re now implementing European-style austerity measures. Our deficit isn’t that bad. I think there are things they could do to raise revenue without abolishing subsidies for education. There doesn’t seem to be any compromise or sympathy for people who can’t afford something, or are struggling. It seems to be a system without sympathy, empathy or compassion. The dollar’s more important than the person.”

In Melbourne, **Jess**, who studies at RMIT University, said: “These attacks are on a broad scale, and university fees are going up. I have friends and family who are first-year apprentices and the allowance for their tools has been cut. They expected that allowance and they need it.” He was referring to the fact that the budget cut the “Tools for Trade” allowance for apprentices, who will be forced into loans of up to \$20,000 to cover their expenses.

“Education and health cuts are ridiculous,” Jess said. “Why take away money from these areas? I know the budget is set to benefit the high-income earners. I can’t fathom it. It is making it like Greece. Look at the economy there! How can you run a country like that? Now Hockey and Abbott want people to work until they are 70. ‘Sharing the pain’ is what they say, but this is wrong. It is affecting the sick and the pensioners, the powerless. They have no voice.”

George, also from RMIT, said: “Every government we’ve had so far in Australia is rubbish. The government is not what it was 30 or 40 years ago. You say they want to make the tax rate the same as in Hong Kong. They can’t do that!”

“Our family is from Greece. In Greece, there is more than 60 percent unemployment among the youth. In a few more years, we’re going to feel the same pain here. I haven’t looked into a socialist program yet, but I’m interested to do so.”

Alice, a University of Melbourne architecture student, said: “Even if Labor does get in, I’m afraid. I don’t trust them to get rid of these cuts. As for the Coalition, they have a slash-and-burn mentality. I can’t trust Labor to overturn these changes. Labor has a history of hanging onto negative Coalition policies.

“Taxes are supposed to be staggered, so that they are

fair. What is being brought in is in the interests of mining and big business, of anybody who sponsored the Liberals’ campaign. What is happening in Europe and America is an appalling smashing of their citizens. I’ve been looking at these issues with my dad, who is always super-investigative. When the budget came out, I was talking to him for about two hours. I hope to go into sustainable building and youth housing. As it is, I can’t afford to live on the rates I’ll earn.”



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