

Protesting workers and youth denounce Australian budget

Our reporters
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World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke with students, workers, unemployed youth and aged pensioners attending the anti-budget protests in Melbourne, Newcastle and Sydney yesterday.

In Melbourne **Elizabeth**, a welfare worker, said she was concerned about the budget's impact on poverty and housing. "There's a total lack of awareness about how people in poverty live," she said.

"We're going to be just like America. It's going to be horrible out there and there'll be a major social breakdown. Really gnarly bad stuff's going to happen with people going homeless and hungry. They want a huge military; they're going to need it because there's going to be total social breakdown."

Wendy from West Heidelberg said: "My concern is for the people, particularly in our community, who are mostly on welfare benefits of some description. I don't know how they're going to survive with the [medical] co-payments because most of them have children going to school. Lots of them have unemployed youth ...

"There are still people who don't receive welfare at all so therefore they're going to be severely disadvantaged ... it's just unbelievable."

Retail worker **Zarah** said: "I didn't agree with Tony Abbott being elected as PM. My mum was sick with breast cancer when he was federal health minister and he made a decision to not put a useful class of drugs on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. Some women lost their homes paying for it, or died if they couldn't afford it.

"Abbott is sexist, homophobic and only cares about rich people. For a government to be elected that only cares about the rich and takes money from schools and health isn't right."

Gareth said that the budget cuts would "make the gap between the rich and the poor much wider. Many of my fellow employees have recently been made redundant at the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation]. We do not seem to have enough money for health or education yet we have money to go and bomb other countries.

"I don't think that if we suddenly had a double dissolution in the parliament that the Labor Party would give all the money back to the ABC. The Greens to a lesser extent are the same as well. I think it's the system that is broken."

Commenting on the government's WWI centenary celebrations, he said: "They want to celebrate ANZAC day every year but we don't look at what that is trying to tell us that lest we forget what? What have we learnt from war? What? Let's go to another war? And you're frowned upon if you say that."

Jenny said she was "incandescent with rage" about the budget. "I object so strongly to the policies that this government is putting forward, claiming a mandate. They don't have a mandate and they did not talk about what they are now doing.

"I object to Hockey's characterisation of everyone as either leaners or lifters. It horrifies me to see things going down the path of an American Republican Tea Party path. How do they expect, if you are on the dole and therefore not being paid, you to be able to buy petrol, food, and apply for 40 jobs a month?"

Kathleen travelled from Tasmania to attend the demonstration: "I'm protesting against the current government's unreasonable ask of those with the least voice to make the most sacrifices. The homeless, they will not raise their voice, and so others have to represent them about what little they have access to being taken.

"The Labor Party has a lot to answer for. They have set up a situation where the common person wants a change and they went to the default position of the Liberals, which is not a change at all."

Christine, an English tutor, said: "The government is once again using the spectre of terrorism to justify an increase in defence but really they should be spending the extra money on the people of Australia. It's a very well-worn path. War doesn't solve anything. Iraq is a mess because of what we did in 2003. There's been no accountability for that. Now we're just going to make it worse again. This government is just part of the western imperialist powers. My concern is

that both major parties are complicit in what's going on."

Tina, a sales representative, said the government was "pushing a them-against-us mentality. It really is a war on the poor and the unemployed and besides that the asylum seeker policy angers me greatly ...

"I think we are worse off but I don't think a change of government would resolve a lot of those issues. One is really no better than the other. The prospect of war scares the hell out of me. I don't have any answers but I don't like the way things are going ... The thing that bothers me the most is the secrecy. You feel like you're headed to a totalitarian regime."

In Sydney, **Rosanne**, a pensioner, said: "I think the nation is in a state of depression at the moment. Everyone I speak to mentions the budget and how it will be affecting them personally. For example, I will be paying off my grandchildren's university debt until I die. If they are lucky and I die early then they will get my inheritance and this will help them.

"To put young people into this level of debt, when they are just young people, is immoral ... but the same thing is happening overseas ... We live in an oligarchy or a plutocracy, there is no democracy. If this is democracy, I don't want to fight for it."

Melissa, a nuclear medicine graduate, said the budget was unfair and "it's clear the corporations are not affected and if anything will benefit." She said she could afford the planned \$7 medical co-payment "but if something serious happens to me and I need to see a doctor regularly this is going to add up and it will add up for someone who has a disability ...

"There are many mixed messages to get us to accept this co-payment. The government said the co-payment would pay for medical research in some large medical fund. How do we know this is going to go to medical research and not go to the stock market?"

Michael, a student teacher said: "It seems like what the government is trying to do is create a less educated general public so that they can have more control. They should be investing more money into education, not taking money out of it, or trying to privatise schools. Education is for everyone, not just for those who can pay ...

"We've seen the American system, how it's gone and how it's failed. It's a system that's based on those who can pay, versus those who can actually do the work, and do the thinking."

Dayne, a Hunter Performing Arts student, attended the Newcastle protest. "This budget is unfair," she said, because it "attacks the most vulnerable people who need the most help and support."

Dayne explained that her brother had recently died from cancer. "I'm thankful he's not around to see the destruction

of the healthcare system which looked after him until his very last breath," she said. "My sister, who is also very ill, now has to suffer through these terrible co-payments because my family is not rich enough to pay for private health and this hurts our family a lot."

Commenting on the attacks on the living standards of workers, Dayne added: "Under this budget I will not be able to have the future I want or, if I have a family, they will have no future. I have seen the destruction on my family in a depressed socioeconomic background and it is not fair. Everybody should have equal opportunity no matter where they come from and this budget makes the divide between the rich and poor so much deeper."

Gracie, who recently left high school, said: "I'm opposed to the cuts and the attacks being carried out on the conditions of working class people—the cuts to welfare, health and education and the conditions of the unemployed. Everything is being attacked."

Asked about the boost in defence spending, Gracie said: "I see a direct connection between increasing military expenditure and the attack on social conditions. While there is no money for welfare programs there is a massive build-up of the air force with billions spent on new jet fighter planes. No doubt this is all in preparation for war."

When told that Labor and the Greens had voted with the government to pass the appropriation bills and cutting \$80 billion, she said. "That is entirely hypocritical. These parties say they oppose the Abbott cuts but when they get the chance to block, they vote for the bills. They say they don't want to cause a constitutional crisis for the Abbott government. I think they are really cowardly. I'm all for causing a crisis for this government ...

"For some time I've started to become more socialist minded as I've become more aware of what's happening in the world. I think it's necessary to get rid of this system which is based on class and profit. I see socialism as providing social equality."



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