

Workers denounce phony “jobs” promises ahead of state election

Our reporters

28 November 2014

Throughout the official campaign for the Victorian state election tomorrow, all of the major parties—Labor, Liberal and Green—have maintained a deafening silence on the deepening economic and social crisis confronting broad layers of workers and young people. These parties, which bear responsibility for rising mass unemployment and poverty, have sought to prevent any discussion of the real issues confronting ordinary people.

The plans by the three major car manufacturers, GM-Holden, Ford and Toyota, to cease production in Australia by 2016–2017, has already seen tens of thousands of jobs destroyed in the sector, including the closure of numerous car component plants. This is only one part of a wave of restructuring and mass sackings taking place throughout the manufacturing sector across Victoria and Australia as a whole.

Unemployment in areas of Melbourne, the state’s capital, has now reached depression-era levels. The destruction by Ford of tens of thousands of jobs from its plant in Broadmeadows—formerly a manufacturing hub—over the last three decades has left large areas of the surrounding suburbs in social ruin. The understated official unemployment rate in Broadmeadows is now 26.4 percent, with similar levels in neighbouring Meadow Heights, Campbellfield and Coolaroo. Joblessness in the eastern suburb of Dandenong, where numerous car component and other industrial plants dependent on the car industry have been centered, has now reached 21 percent.

While making no mention of the social crisis, both major parties have presented bogus “jobs” plans. Liberal Premier Denis Napthine claims that his party’s “Victorian Jobs in the 21st Century” package will create 200,000 jobs. Labor Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews has countered with a pledge to create 100,000 jobs in two years. The corporate and financial elite, well aware that all of these pledges are worthless, has enthusiastically

supported both rival “jobs” policies, which will mean billion-dollar handouts to sections of big business.

Workers and young people in Broadmeadows and Dandenong who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* this week denounced these jobs promises as a sham.

Annette, from Dandenong, is currently unemployed with four children. “I think Labor’s promise of 100,000 jobs is rubbish,” she said. “Labor had a very long time to turn things around. I’ve given up on both parties to be honest.” She added: “If things don’t change, I don’t see a future for my kids. It’s going to be very difficult for them. Without the necessary skills, you can’t get a job.”

She added: “I don’t think any government around the world is in control of anything at the moment. I think they are being ruled by money. I don’t watch the news anymore because it all seems so controlled.”

When asked about the election promises, Jamieson Flauta [photo], originally from the Philippines, said: “I don’t believe that. Look around here: a lot of people don’t have jobs and many people depend on [unemployment benefit provider] Centrelink.”

David Murphy is a university lecturer at Deakin University, specializing in education studies. “The promise of 100,000 jobs is nonsense,” he said. “I don’t think anyone in the electorate believes that. That’s why both parties are viewed with deep suspicion. We don’t listen to that sort of rubbish anymore.” He added: “I used to be a Labor supporter, but I don’t have any politics anymore.”

Those who spoke to the WSWs in Broadmeadows described the social crisis in the area. Kerry Wilkins, a 61-year-old unemployed single mother, told WSWs reporters: “I’m almost at retirement age, but I can’t afford to retire. What would I live on?”

“For the last job I had,” she continued, “I ended up organising my own study to get a job in childcare. I organised and paid for my Certificate II in childcare. I had

to give up on that job halfway because I had a heart attack. Two days after I got out of hospital I still had to turn up to a job agency [to avoid being cut off unemployment benefits]. When I was in hospital, I had filled out the correct Centrelink form. They told me I still had to come in and wait for 45 minutes to clarify that I was unwell and had just come out of the hospital.

“At this stage I should be winding down, I had a heart attack, and am on insulin for diabetes, and now they’ve found ulcers. Even with all of that, all these job networks are designed to make you jump through hoops and make you feel bad for getting an allowance—money that’s allocated for use.”

Referring to the election campaign by the major parties, Kerry said: “I don’t know, I’ve got to vote like everyone else, but there’s no difference.”

Derek, a fitter and turner by trade living in Springvale, a suburb adjacent to Dandenong, described the impact of the shutdown of the car industry on manufacturing. “There are no jobs available,” he said. “I used to work for an engineering company and we built the robotic lines for GM Holden in Elizabeth, in South Australia, and for Ford in Geelong [in Victoria]. Now there is none of that sort of work available. For the last few years I was in labour hire, but for the last six months there has been nothing in that.” He explained that he had now just got a job as a driver for Australia Post.

“My partner does factory work at a plastics company,” he added. “They made a lot of auto parts, but since the car companies announced their closure, that sort of work has dropped off. She’s managed to pick up other sort of work, but manufacturing in this country is dead.”

Derek concluded: “I don’t think much of the major parties, particularly Labor. Why would you believe politicians? I agree with you. I think the working class needs a new party.”



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