

# Australia: Workers and youth oppose war and austerity in Victorian election

Our reporters

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Workers and young people discussed a range of political concerns with *World Socialist Web Site* reporters outside polling booths during Saturday's Victorian state election.

Throughout the official election campaign, the major parliamentary parties—Labor, Liberal and the Greens—buried any mention of the essential issues confronting ordinary people—the ongoing destruction of jobs and living standards in Victoria and across Australia, the US-led military aggression in the Middle East and the dangers posed by Washington's "pivot to Asia" against China.

**Lianna**, who works as a counsellor in Broadmeadows, a working-class suburb of Melbourne, said: "If I had a choice, I wouldn't vote. What they say they'll do has to be compared with what they did and what's happening now. The same thing happened with the last Labor government.

"Why would we want to vote? They're abusing our vote. They're all the same, just wrapped differently. Labor was in the government for so long but they did nothing to address the crisis [in health]. I've been on waiting lists for two years for a medical test ...

"Where's the money for healthcare going? War. People can't get ordinary healthcare here and there are people who can't get dental care. The government doesn't put money into that, they put it in war. They've just spent millions and millions on defence and now they're talking about buying submarines."

**Cohen**, 25, from Broadmeadows, is studying social services at a private education provider. He explained that he had cast an empty ballot in protest against all the parties. "I think the parties are the same," he said. "It doesn't matter who you vote for, they'll just end up breaking promises. We're not in their best interests, there's something else. They represent themselves and the rich.

"I don't believe what they're saying about the war in

Iraq and Syria," he added. "I think they've got their own agenda, to control the Middle East and their resources."

In Dandenong, another working-class area, **Mohammad**, a truck driver who emigrated from Afghanistan in 2005, commented: "Each election they promise lots of things—education, roads, everything—but it never happens. They just break their promises."

"The war in Iraq and Syria is a waste of money. It's big business for the US and it's all about oil. They keep making trouble in Iraq and the Middle East to make sure they get cheap oil."

Mohammad pointed to the conditions in Afghanistan. "The government in Afghanistan had elections but there was a lot of corruption. The Americans fixed it. The Afghanistan government is under the control of America ... They called on people to vote but none of them were counted. They put in who they want, not who the people want. I know this is 100 percent true because it has happened a couple of times."

**Atem**, a mature-age student currently looking for work, said: "I don't think there's any difference [between the Liberal and Labor]. I couldn't see it ... If the Greens came to be a major party they would do the same thing. There are no differences between them ...

"There are a lot of social problems affecting me. I've applied for government housing but never get it, even though I have very little. I just do my studies and get the Newstart allowance, which means that after I've paid rent I have less than \$200 a fortnight to live on. I don't care about who comes into power, they will do the same. There are a lot of migrants living in this situation.

"I have two diplomas but can't get a job ... Whenever I go to the factories they tell me that with my qualifications they don't want me. So where can I get a job? I'm qualified to be a community worker and to work in the legal service."

**Valter**, a full-time student, commented: "The

politicians are driven by money, and ensuring corporate profit. It seems like one big game: whether it's Labor or Liberal, there is no difference. Every election they make promises but then they make budget cuts to things people need, like education. You grow up with ideals that the government is there to help the people but that's not the reality."

In Footscray, another working-class centre, **Andrew**, a recently retrenched finance industry worker, explained: "I was made redundant after 20 years. They got consultants in and it was 'see you later.' I was lucky to get another job.

"I'm particularly concerned about the greed of the CEOs—they get a \$10 million pay packet for two or three years' work. They're only concerned about the short term ... Look at all the jobs that have gone in the car industry. Look at Bonds [the clothing company], which made good products, but was closed down. It's a quick win for the CEOs. They still get their bonuses.

"I hope that the East-West tunnel is curtailed. Look at the toll on the Tullamarine freeway. You have to pay toll to get into the city where you didn't have to pay toll before. It was a fantastic deal for [private road operator] Transurban."

**Le Tan**, a housewife with two children, said: "The government is not doing anything for the people or for the economy. They should think about the jobless ... The less well-off are affected so badly.

"Look at the hospitals. If you don't have money, you die because the waiting lists are too long. They don't respect you unless you are royalty. I'm saying this not just because I'm Asian. It is the same for everybody. I also feel sorry for the elderly pensioners.

"It is pretty hard for families like ours with only one income. School fees go up, everything goes up. There's a scarcity of jobs, scarcity of housing, taxes are high, rental properties are expensive and people are barely surviving."



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