Queensland voters give voice to disaffection

Our correspondents
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During last Saturday's state election in the Australian state of Queensland, Socialist Equality Party members and supporters spoke to voters at Kippa-Ring, an outer northern suburb of Brisbane, the state capital.

Kippa-Ring forms part of the electorate of Redcliffe, whose working class residents face growing unemployment and poverty. Officially, the jobless rate rose from 7.2 percent to 10.4 percent in the year to last September, and youth unemployment is twice as high.

The Labor Party regained the seat last year in a by-election. It had held the seat since 1989, but lost it at the previous state election in 2012, when the Labor government suffered a landslide defeat, after two decades in office, because of its austerity measures, particularly a sweeping privatisation program that axed thousands of public sector jobs.

Many voters told us they were voting Labor this time, but without any enthusiasm, out of hostility toward the state Liberal National Party (LNP) government and the federal Liberal-National government. A young apprentice carpenter gave voice to the sentiments of many when he said he voted for Labor because the media was calling for a LNP vote, but thought that the entire political system was a circus.

Michael, 28, a contractor for a utility company, said he voted for Family First, which is a right-wing Christian-based party, but knew nothing about them. "I don't take voting seriously as politics in this country seems to be a joke," he said. "Liberal and Labor are a joke. It's a worldwide problem actually. I think the system needs an overhaul.

"I believe that we're led by the very people that we should despise. If you get to be the CEO of a company, you don't get there because you valued your workers or you were a nice person. You got there because you know how to step on people. The same goes for politicians. They didn't get there, because they were voted for as such, but because they know the right people and make deals with the 'wrong' people."

Michael was more concerned about the soaring cost of living and the lack of job opportunities than about the sell-off of public assets. "People don't have the benefit of a decent job anymore and the cost of living keeps going up," he commented. "And having the government own certain entities, like the utilities and water, doesn't help. It's a mechanism to drive costs up. Nor would it be better if it was privatised. And technically it is a privatised entity of the government itself."

Brian, 84, was worried that Prime Minister Tony Abbott's federal government was increasing the danger of war. "Abbott has declared war on the Muslims and you never get out of debt by going to war. It not only destroys property, but lives and everything else … They're going to war and selling assets that don't belong to them. They're a bunch of thieves. How can I vote for them!

"There's going to be austerity measures. We're going to face higher taxes because of going to war and it means they've got to raise the GST [Goods and Services Tax] and other taxes that will hit the working people hardest. The man who's got everything doesn't need to buy things. The point is there is only a handful of millionaires and billionaires, whereas there are millions of working people."

Brian was opposed to higher tertiary education fees. "My daughter wants to become a nurse," he explained. "In the past, you went to Redcliffe, which is a training hospital, you started as a nurse's aide and got paid to learn. Now you've got to go to university a year before you can even work in a hospital. To get a degree in nursing costs $50,000. It costs an arm and two legs for university and they want to treble the university fees!"

Chris, 34, a geologist, was acutely aware of the global slide in gas and oil prices. "I'm part of the mining industry," he explained. "We're in the middle

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of a depression. There are a lot of people out of work. I'm lucky I've still got a job.

"Because of the resources, we've weathered the storm. When all that contagion started happening from 2008 onward, the Chinese were starting to pile lots of money into [infrastructure] developments to avoid it. So we just got taken on that ride ... But at some point, eventually that depression in the global economy was going to hit, and it is. That's what is going on right now."

Having worked in poverty-stricken African countries, Chris said: "I've been to these poor countries and seen the social problems. You see the amount of wealth in the Western countries and how the oligarchs live and it just makes you disgusted. You could do so much good [with the wealth]."

Chris commented: "I'm still disgusted by the fact that the gap between the rich and the poor has gotten ever wider. And with banks you hear scandal after scandal … You've got to be somewhere near psychopathic to be in banking anyway. And probably if you're a politician too.

"I can't say that I'm right wing or left wing. I call a spade a spade. But I definitely see that we're getting screwed. Capitalism doesn't work. It clearly doesn't work. However, can we go totally to socialism either? That's not worked in other places too. Look at Russia. The Chinese are probably the most capitalist of any state."

"But the global economy as such is capitalist-based and it's going to be hard to change that. I don't think humans are that good at learning lessons. In the French Revolution, where the elites and princes held the power, the people were going hungry and they revolted. The Russian Revolution was the same thing and it will keep on happening so long as we don't spread the wealth properly. I really do believe that."



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