

Working class voters in NSW denounce the parliamentary parties

Our correspondents

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World Socialist Web Site correspondents spoke with a wide range of voters—workers, students, youth, retirees, welfare recipients and immigrants—outside polling booths in the four electorates where the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) stood candidates in last Saturday’s New South Wales state election.

Contrary to media claims, Saturday’s election was not a “vote of trust” in Premier Mike Baird’s Liberal government. Nor was it a “restoration of support” for Labor. The prevailing sentiment was political hostility toward Liberal, Labor and other parliamentary parties.

The following interviews, the first of two instalments, highlight concerns about the fraud of parliamentary democracy, rising inequality, soaring housing costs, youth unemployment and cuts to education. The next article will feature comments about government attacks on social welfare, the danger of war and the SEP’s socialist and internationalist program.

In the Summer Hill electorate, **Nathan** commented: “There’s something wrong with the way democracy works. It seems to be that all they’re doing is giving us an opportunity to make us feel like we’re doing something ... The system we’ve got doesn’t work at all. Do I feel powerful being able to vote? No, because it doesn’t seem to matter.”

Jasmine, a retiree who migrated from Greece in the 1960s, spoke about her concerns for the unemployed. “Young people have no jobs or decent pay. The unemployed people can’t even afford rent, electricity, even a mobile phone. They are living in poverty. The price of housing is terrible. Three bedroom houses where I live in Strathfield are now \$1 million, even \$2 million. It is too much.”

Michael who works in a homelessness service, said society was “divided into losers and winners ... There is this mindset of get money now, get it young. It’s

materialism, capitalism gone crazy. Eventually it will kill us all.”

Michael continued: “One of biggest social issues in Sydney is homelessness. Once you’re on the homeless pile, it is very hard to get out. When house values are going up \$100,000 or \$200,000 per year, the average person who hasn’t got a mortgage can’t afford a deposit.”

In the southwest Sydney electorate of Bankstown, **Martha**, a public hospital nurse, originally from South Africa, said she “totally disagreed” with capitalist society. “The richer are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. The poor are not just standing still; they are getting poorer.

“I feel sorry for the young kids at school. They are getting so confused, and they don’t know what to do. They can see we are heading for disaster and we need to turn the society around ... The wealth should be spread equally, a bit like Robin Hood!”

Martha was outraged by the deal struck last week by the SDA, the retail industry union in South Australia, to slash penalty rates for evening and weekend work. “That is coming our way as well. Already, nurses are losing our rostered days off and our penalties. We are getting less, and they are cutting staff.”

Asked about the SEP and its program, Martha said: “You should make people more aware of the party, that you are out there and what you stand for. I know you can’t compete with all the parties with the money to advertise, but you have to get ordinary people like us ... And it needs to be global ... There’s a lot of war out there, and you know what? It’s all about power and money.”

Jonathon, originally from Samoa and now unemployed, said Labor and Liberal were “all the same.” The former store manager blamed Prime

Minister Tony Abbott's government for the fact that he had not found work for the past three years, despite paying \$12,000 to a private college for a 12-month diploma of business management course.

"All the government does is send us to do course after course but they never find us jobs. They pay all this money to the employment agencies for courses, but they give us nothing."

Mark, a video production manager, said there was no party "worthy" of voting for. Referring to the election of the Syriza "radical left" government in Greece, he said: "I reckon that could happen here! The people there were so sick of governments never doing what they wanted them to do, that they went out and voted for an alternative."

"I know that Syriza is now carrying out the austerity policies that they promised not to ... They just bowed down to the pressures like anyone else would ... They betrayed the people who voted for them, which is what our politicians do every week ... We don't have democracy today, just a pretence. I would like to see something else, and most people here today would as well."

University students **Alaa** and **Youssef** from Bass Hill in Bankstown, said the election would "change nothing" for workers and youth. They pointed to the rising cost of tertiary education.

"It is going to get harder to live and for students from poor backgrounds it's going to be much harder," Alaa said. "It's unfair. Poor students are just scraping through and we barely have enough money to get through university or TAFE [Technical and Further Education] ... Education should have no price; education should be for free."

In Penrith, in outer western Sydney, **Michael**, 46, a builders labourer, said: "I just think Labor are not that far from the Liberal Party. When the Liberals get in they take things away from you and when the Labor Party get back in, they don't put it back ... In construction, we lost a lot of conditions, then when [former Labor prime minister] Kevin Rudd got in, nothing came back."

Ruth, 76, a retiree, said: "Everything is geared to money. Besides the banks, I think they are a handful of people in the country who dictate what happens. Everyone else is excluded."

For young people, Ruth continued, "the world has

lost all its meaning. They won't be getting jobs ... They are ripping the guts out of TAFE, so there are less and less apprenticeships. Even if they go into an apprenticeship, what are they going to do with it afterwards?"

In the central coast electorate of Wyong, **Debra**, a Gosford Hospital nurse, denounced the attacks on penalty rates. "We rallied against this a few weeks ago in Sydney ... We have to go to university and get a Registered Nursing degree—this is three years study—in order to achieve our qualifications but our base wage is the same as someone who works a checkout at Coles. The only way we can get a decent income to get a reasonable living standard is to work weekends and shift work for penalty rates."

Jarrah, a former building worker and now employed as a patient services assistant at Gosford Hospital, said Labor "does not represent the working class ... I feel like a slave and will need to slave away until I am 70."

At Wyong's Chittaway Bay, **Pat** denounced inadequate state funding for schools. She voted Labor but added: "I think they are influenced by the money of large corporations. Money speaks and they are comfortable with it. Whoever has the money has the power."

"I once thought the Democrats were OK but they disappeared when their leader agreed to let the GST [Goods and Services Tax] pass through parliament. It is an anti-working class tax because it taxes the millionaires the same amount as pensioners for the same goods and services. I don't think there really is anyone there now we can say represents us."

Also at Chittaway Bay, **Kerri** said she supported the SEP: "I think socialism would be a good thing. I think we need a drastic change. It would mean a real struggle ... [but] the working class make up the biggest numbers and they must band together and really think about what is going on."

To be continued



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