

Australian workers and students voice concerns on Brexit

Our reporters
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Socialist Equality Party election campaign team members spoke to workers and youth in several Australian cities this week, asking for their reaction to the referendum vote for Britain to leave the European Union (EU).

All those interviewed saw the result as a major global event with vast economic and political implications and voiced hostility to the agenda being dictated by the financial markets and their agencies.

Many expressed concern at the whipping up of nationalism and xenophobia, and drew parallels with the rise of Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican Party presidential nominee, in the US elections. They spoke of the danger of war and the need to unify the struggles of the working class across national borders.

At Southport on Queensland's Gold Coast, **Anna**, a public health worker, originally from New Zealand, said she was concerned by the Brexit vote. "I think they are going to regret it, but not necessarily for the right reasons. This seems to have been a way of people trying to keep money in their own country. It was a way of encouraging racism and saying, 'no, we don't want to give jobs to anyone who's not like us,'" she said.

Anna agreed that the whipping up of nationalism could lead toward war. "You have people being displaced all the time, and they are being ostracised," she said.

Working-class people voted to leave the EU, Anna continued, because "poorer people are so disadvantaged that, given the opportunity to speak about anything, they've jumped on it. The government has refused to do anything about the real issues that affect poorer people, like health, their incomes, their jobs, their long-term future."

Anna noted "the lie told by the Leave campaign that the money going to the EU would be allocated to the National Health Service. Now, the Leave people have already said that's not going to happen, because the money was never there to be allocated to that. It's like most of our elections here. It's about who has the money to have their say, and that's not fair."

Anna thought the SEP was right to campaign for an active

boycott of the Brexit referendum, and for the unity of the British, European and international working class. "A boycott would have been the most sensible policy... A lot of people thought that if they got a say, someone would listen to them, but they were wrong."

Stephen, a worker from Auburn in western Sydney, said: "The UK pulled out of the EU because it wanted to avoid being trapped by Europe's debt. Greece and other countries in Europe are on the verge of bankruptcy, and an ordinary local person cannot withdraw their money from the bank. People in the UK don't want to be tied into these problems. Many of them really wanted to go back to the old days of an isolated UK, standing within its own borders."

Asked if he thought this was viable, Stephen replied that it might "solve things for Britain if it can keep its economy running," but this was doubtful in the long-term. "Britain and the US are the world's elite and they're trying not to be overtaken by any other countries. They want to protect their own interests.

"The big problem for capitalism is the world's debt, which amounts to trillions of dollars. The capitalist system is facing collapse. If that happens, it will be like a cyclone. Conflicts could happen between countries in the EU and within them. In the US and Europe the military would be used to overtake the cities and put down civil disturbances if there is widespread panic, the banks close and people can't buy anything, like in Greece. All these countries are building up their militaries, preparing for this."

Stephen said: "The banks here could easily collapse as well. They are all dependent on derivatives, and Great Britain has large investments here. The Liberal government is in debt and trying to save money by cutting off social welfare and attacking working people." None of the main political parties had any real solution, Stephen concluded.

James, a psychology student at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), commented: "I think that with Brexit, the more unity we have the better. I think with nationalism on the rise, it is not a good thing at all. We need to be united. We are all the same people. Nationalism

promotes racism and the drive towards war, and that will be the end for us all.

“I’m worried about the US too. It is worrying that people support Trump. Trump is like this generation’s Hitler. Both Trump and Hitler are bullies and they both have radical policies. I know Clinton is a warmonger but I guess the lesser evil than Trump. Bernie Sanders was a much better option.”

At the Brunswick shopping centre in Melbourne, **Darius**, a sound designer, commented: “I don’t think Britain leaving the EU is the answer, as it presents more problems for Britain, for Europe and financially, potentially, for the rest of the world. Who knows what the knock-on effect will be? I’m really hoping it will not be the next global financial crisis.

“I think that those that voted to leave the EU were people thinking that they could give the Tories a kick by voting against Cameron’s wishes, which is absolutely idiotic. Boris Johnson was using it as a grab for power for himself.

“The situation is very complex. Whatever governments are in, they need to hold the corporations and banks to account, put people first. I don’t think there will be war, but with a divided Europe there is more chance of the old crap coming up. It is a concern.”

Also at Brunswick, a **Tamil worker**, who did not want to be identified, said: “There needs to be a world without borders, if you look at it from a global perspective. We have enough money to support everything. With the Brexit vote, both sides, ‘Leave’ and ‘Remain,’ utilised racial issues—the world has been integrated anyway.

“I lived in the UK for seven years. The working class has been screwed for a long time. We pay everything and get nothing. We are all struggling. Governments are looking after the people who have got money. What can we do? You are doing something. How can I make a difference? I feel my opportunity to change anything has gone, but I’m worried for the future of the kids and the grandkids”.

Hanuman, an engineering student at RMIT, said he had not followed the Brexit campaign until after the vote. “I only heard about the exit from the European Union after the vote had already happened, then I regretted it,” he said. “It seems pretty important.”

Hanuman had paid more attention to the US election. “In the US they are only given a choice between two people, and neither of them seems too appealing. Trump is joke. Like the building of the wall is ridiculous. He is a danger to the population, especially people that are working class, or people that are not US citizens as well. I don’t know a lot about Clinton, but I know she’s heavily influenced by Wall Street.”

Chris, a University of Newcastle student, said Brexit was

taking place for the “wrong reasons,” on the basis of “cutting your borders off to protect your backyard.” He explained: “I see a lot of xenophobia in that, but their jobs aren’t being taken from migrants. The people coming in are being lied to as well.”

Chris foresaw “a lot of instability in the coming period.” He commented: “What there will be is an increase in the level of racism and xenophobia... Certain sections of the EU are calling that they leave quickly.” Chris added: “It is very scary, like, what’s going to happen in the next 10 years? Look at what happened in the 30s and 40s in Europe.”

Michael, a student teacher at Newcastle, said the “British exit is very reactionary.” He added: “One of the more interesting comments that I have heard is that England will once again be free to do globally and economically what they want... England wants to take control and start dominating places again.”

Michael said there was a “nationalistic mood, so it’s a bit predictable that fascist forces are beginning to gain momentum.” He added: “The West is using Muslims as a scapegoat. They have been leapt on by the financial elite as a third party to blame. It’s exactly what happened to the Jews.”

“Workers’ conditions are being hit a lot, but the ruling elites are making more and more money. The breaking down of the European Union is itself a major issue. They could be looking towards war again, particularly with Russia.”

To contact the SEP and get involved, visit our web site or Facebook page.

Authorised by James Cogan, Shop 6, 212 South Terrace, Bankstown Plaza, Bankstown, NSW 2200.



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