

Australian voters speak on Brexit and the political issues facing the working class

Our reporters
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Last Saturday, on polling day for the Australian federal election, the WSWs spoke to voters about the political issues that they confront, and the international context of the double-dissolution election.

The alienation of broad layers of the population from Labor, the Liberals, and the entire political establishment was palpable. In the days since the election, the result remains unclear, with neither of the major parties having secured enough seats as yet to form a government in their own right.

The corporate and financial elite has responded with undisguised hostility and frustration over the refusal of millions of people to support parties identified with war abroad, and austerity at home. Retail billionaire Gerry Harvey openly suggested the establishment of a dictatorship, while numerous commentators have declared that the population is “ungovernable.”

The election outcome is a distorted expression of a developing political radicalization of workers and young people around the world. Many of those who spoke to the WSWs have closely followed developments internationally, including the campaign of Bernie Sanders, the candidate in the Democratic primaries for the US election who won mass support based on the mistaken belief that he was a socialist. Britain’s decision to exit the European Union was also a concern.

In the Seat of Blaxland, in Sydney’s southwest, **Abdul**, a telecommunications worker said he “didn’t vote for anyone. None of these parties were going to get my support because it doesn’t matter which way we vote. Liberal, Labor or Greens, we’re still screwed.”

He spoke against the “war on terror,” which has included intense police surveillance of working class areas in southwestern Sydney. “The government says it’s taking pre-emptive action to prevent terrorism is beyond stupid. It means that the country is actually involved in instigating wars. This is also being used to take away our basic rights.

“What rights do we have to lose for this? And the kids that have been accused of terrorism here in Australia are the

victims of religious brainwashing. You can’t really call them terrorists. They’ve been failed by the system.”

Phillip who works as a storeman at a supermarket said that he “went for the Greens and the firearms party. I didn’t vote for Liberal or Labour—they’re full of crap.” The WSWs asked Phillip what attracted him to the Greens. “Nothing really. They’ll probably do better than the other two guys. Labor and Liberal—they say they are going to do things and it never happens. You always see another tax come in. They say they’ll help a school but a year down the track that all changes. It’s gone on for years. They’re both the same. From my perspective, they don’t help me.”

Cassandra, a university student in Melbourne, voted for the Greens. She explained: “Deregulation of university fees is a big issue for me. Marriage equality is another huge one, and immigration policy. I’m against both Liberal and Labor because their treatment of refugees is terrible. Australia should be doing more. It is not illegal to seek asylum, it is guaranteed in the UN charter.”

She denounced the bipartisan assault on higher education. “I think university should be free. People Malcolm Turnbull’s age got a free education. I’ve been to rallies against fee deregulation—I think it is one of the most abhorrent policies. If it succeeds it will destroy education in Australia. There have already been cuts and cuts, and there is no help for anyone who doesn’t come from a wealthy family who can buy their degree.”

Darren works as a printer. He was one of a number of workers in Melbourne who raised the US presidential election campaign with WSWs reporters. “I was very encouraged by what was going on in America with Bernie Sanders,” he said. “I think it’s a step in the right direction for western democracy generally. The participation and the interest in it and the fact that he’s prepared to openly state where the money’s going, why people are struggling in their lives and to call for simple things like universal health cover.

“The very notion of universal health cover is anathema to the right wing ... I think people are waking up to the fact that if we stick together we can effect change. I’m broke. I’ve

got no health cover. I'm working hard. I had a health issue which saw me off work for a year and now I've used up all my savings.

"For me it's a question of social democracy versus neo-liberalism. We've been overrun by free market ideology for so long and the consequences of it are being felt. The ideas that drive neo-liberalism are social Darwinism. These policies are designed to make the poor struggle and drop off the face of the earth. I'm all for the redistribution of wealth. I'm supportive of socialism."

Ubee, a cook, spoke with the SEP in Marrickville, in the inner-west of Sydney. He said that there had been the rise of a "very xenophobic culture, as we have seen with Brexit. Right now Muslim people are being targeted. Before that it was Asian immigrants. There is always a new group to make the enemy. And that's to get people behind right-wing politics."

Speaking on the Australian election, Ubee commented: "From the last election, people feel defrauded by the Liberal government. The only reason people voted Liberal was because of the instability of the Labor Party. I don't think the two-party system offers anything. Labor has always been the working class vote, but that's just the image that they trade. Do they really stand for the working class, for the persecuted? If you look at their policy on refugees, there is no difference between Liberal and Labor."

"The excuse given for border controls is that it's a matter of safety. It's not. These are people just like us. Refugees are running from wars that Western intervention and persecution of the working class has created."

In Newcastle, WSWS reporters spoke to **Andrew**, a university student and part-time music teacher. He said that he was "more pro keeping Britain in the EU," but added, "I am not a fan of the EU itself."

"The principles on which the EU was established were good, but the way it is carried out is not. The EU gives Europe an excuse to walk over other countries. The bigger countries control the economy of the smaller countries, such as the Balkans."

"Britain leaving gives an image of trying to get back the glory days of the empire and imperialism. Brexit could lead to higher tensions in Europe and it also appears to be completely built on xenophobia."

Nathan, 38, a bank worker spoke to the WSWS in the Sydney suburb of Ashfield.

"I come from a former cotton town in the north of England. My friends strongly urged me to vote for an exit because the core belief of a lot of people in that town is that the benefits of globalization are not seen there, but the negative effects are. The town voted 60/40 for Brexit," he explained.

"The result was no surprise to me. I think people in the UK are unbelievably angry at the moment, especially in the poorer class. People in London almost have no idea what is going on in the rest of the country. The banks went under in 2008 and were saved by the government—in fact it was the taxpayer. The country has never recovered. No one has gone to jail for that, nobody's been disgraced. The banks are back in business. It's a warped situation."

"The UK is trying to cut the welfare system to get out of recession, which is a terrible policy, I couldn't disagree with it more."

Vittoria, a pensioner originally from Italy, voted for the SEP in the seat of Wills in Melbourne. "I am so disillusioned and disappointed in all the parties," she explained. "I really did not know what to do, I didn't want the Liberals to get in again but the others are all the same. Labor and Liberals are no different and when they blame everything on the refugees I get angry. I get really mad when people say refugees jump the queue—what queue? There are immigration queues in Bangladesh? That is a bad joke?"

"I voted for Will [Fulgenzi] to get rid of Turnbull and Shorten. I feel so sorry for young people. When I was young you could knock on a factory door and ask if they had any vacancies and they would say 'when can you start?' And it is not young people's fault that Australia has gone to the dogs, it is the fact that big companies want to make big profits and they go overseas or they put all their money in Switzerland ... I am so angry, disillusioned and so sad because the world has never been this bad. Young people have nothing."

Paul, a radiologist, expressed support for the SEP's campaign. "I very much agree with the SEP. There is a global awakening for socialism, and I think it can work en masse. I came across the SEP at the shopping centre. I read the literature and I agree with everything about it, like power to the workers. Corporations have taken over the political establishment."

"The stigma that used to exist about socialism has gone. War and the distribution of wealth are big issues. Bernie Sanders initially turned my interests in this direction and, lo and behold, there's a party, the SEP that represents my exact interests, that I was not aware of before."



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