

Interviews with voters at the Batman by-election

Our reporters
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The Batman by-election on Saturday, narrowly won by the Labor Party against the favoured Greens' candidate, again demonstrated the growing crisis of the entire political establishment (see: "Australian by-election in Melbourne heightens Greens' crisis").

World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke with a range of voters in the electorate. Outside the working-class booth of East Reservoir Primary School, unemployed worker Marney expressed her hostility to all the major parliamentary parties. She was one of several people to object to the enormous resources expended by Labor and the Greens on their election campaigns.

"I'm really not happy with Labor—it was borderline harassment," she explained. "We were getting robo [telephone] calls every day and letters addressed to me, my husband, and to the household. It's just ridiculous, just a waste of paper for a candidate I've never even heard of. The amount of advertising, the billboards is amazing ... That's nearly harassment from Ged Kearney—that's not what I want from a politician. She could have donated all that money to a good cause."

Marney's husband Damir, who is working as a kitchen-hand, agreed, stating that the money should have been used to clean up the asbestos that remained in the roofs of the school classrooms where they had just voted.

Marney said that she had voted for the Animal Justice Party, as a protest after having become "really disillusioned" with the Greens. "I hate the Liberals and Labor," she said, "and the Greens, I've voted for them in the past and they've let me down."

Asked about the central issue confronting working people that was never raised in the course of the by-election—the danger of a US-instigated regional or global war—Marney replied: "Governments have always been preparing for wars—that's nothing new. I

was born in the mid-1980s and I feel like war is constant. When I was in Year 7, the Twin Towers [in New York] were hit and it has just been constant ever since. I've grown up with it—it's quite normal."

Con, who came to Australia from Greece when he was six years old, is a former member of the Storemen and Packers Union (now the National Union of Workers). He explained that he had previously "bought into the agenda" of the pseudo-left Syriza government in Greece. He regards its enforcement of a brutal austerity regime on behalf of the European financial oligarchy as "one of the most disappointing things I've ever come across."

Con expressed the hostility of a layer of workers towards the Labor Party. "I became politically aware when Labor introduced enterprise bargaining [in the 1990s]," he said. "To get pay rises you had to give up something. In the end if you follow that trajectory you would have nothing to give up in the end, and you would have given up everything you gained for a few dollars."

He continued: "That's when I became aware what's going on. Up until then I respected the unions but the way they pushed enterprise bargaining and the Accord I knew they were stuffed. The sell-out was on. Since then it's got progressively worse. It's tax cuts for the wealthy, then you have a budget emergency. How do you repair that? Cuts to services."

Many workers explained that they had cast their vote for Labor candidate Ged Kearney, but did so without enthusiasm.

John, a 70-year-old plasterer originally from Yugoslavia, said he had voted Labor as he had done for the last 50 years. He immediately added: "There's no point in voting, it's just a waste of time. These people [politicians] will do what they want to do, you know?"

He opposed the calling of the by-election over the alleged dual citizenship of the former parliamentarian, David Feeney: “That is wrong. You are what you are. If you are born somewhere else, so what?”

Di and Lorraine both voted Labor, on “lesser evil” grounds.

“The Liberals are definitely for the wealthy and the Greens are too close to the Liberals,” Di said. After discussing the political situation, she added: “I am disillusioned ... We need social equality—maybe we should go to socialism, where everybody gets a cut. Look at how pensioners have to live. It is a lot harsher for them now. There should be money for everybody, for health, for the elderly. Look at all the homeless, I see them when I come out from work in the city. It breaks my heart.”

Mohammed is an unemployed worker, originally from Somalia. “I worked 12 years in the factory at Calsonic Australia,” he explained. “We made spare parts for cars—heaters, air conditioning, radiators. It is a Japanese company, now it has gone to China. There are no car companies here, they have all moved to China, Thailand. The car industry has been destroyed.”

He explained that he has voted Labor ever since the former Hawke-Keating government approved his permanent residency in Australia. “There is not much difference between the parties, but the poor people vote Labor.”

Several people who voted Saturday expressed anger over having to vote at all. One student from La Trobe University explained that he had just randomly filled in the ballot paper to get it over with.

Vikki, an administration worker, said: “I vote because I have to do it, to be quite honest. I know I might sound cynical, but I believe it’s rigged. I don’t believe that our votes matter. This is all a farce.”

Veronica, a teacher’s aide in a local primary school, and Ray, a self-employed flooring contractor, also spoke with the WSWS.

“I voted Greens for the first time,” Ray explained. “I don’t think Labor’s done much for the area. They make a lot of promises and don’t keep them. In the old days I was Labor, then I voted Liberal and now Greens ... Sometimes you have to give a message to the old parties. They promise you the world but do nothing. I’ve run my own business and I’ve seen the cost of essential services like gas and electricity skyrocket. I

don’t know how your average guy can afford to live. I’d hate to be a young couple now, trying to get ahead and buy a house.”

Veronica said, “I don’t think there’s any good party. They don’t have to make ridiculous promises, just say what you’re going to do and do it. They give you promises to get your vote and then when they’re in [parliament] they just do what they want.”



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