

Report finds majority of Australian youth favour socialism

Oscar Grenfell
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A significant report, published last week by the Centre for Independent Studies (CIS), a right-wing think-tank with close ties to the political establishment, found that the overwhelming majority of Australian “millennials”—defined as those born between 1980 and 1996—have a favourable view of socialism.

The CIS report detailing the results of a survey conducted by polling agency, YouGov Galaxy, is a worried warning to Australia’s ruling elite of a political radicalisation among young people and the threat that it poses to the capitalist system. It is headlined, “Millennials and socialism: Australian youth are lurching to the left.”

The report was co-authored by Tom Switzer, CIS executive director. In 2008, he served as a senior advisor to then federal Liberal-National leader Brendan Nelson. Switzer has since worked as a senior associate at the University of Sydney’s US Studies Centre, a think-tank funded by the US and Australian governments, and as an opinion editor for Rupert Murdoch’s national flagship, the *Australian*.

Respondents were asked for their “overall view of socialism.” Some 58 percent indicated a favourable view, compared to 18 percent with an unfavourable opinion. Around 23 percent said they did know enough to respond.

About 63 percent of university-educated millennials had a favourable view of socialism, the highest cohort in the survey breakdown. The CIS authors noted the trend, saying, “critics have suggested that universities are lurching to the left.” Their appeal for “more evidence-based research” of this “issue,” can only be read as a thinly-veiled call for ramped-up surveillance and political censorship on university campuses.

Well over 50 percent across all of the demographic breakdowns indicated a favourable view of socialism.

This included among males and females, students educated at vocational TAFE colleges, working-class youth who did not study after high school, and rural and regional respondents.

The poll showed that the growing attraction to socialism is closely related to a rise of anti-capitalist sentiments.

Around 59 percent of all respondents agreed that “capitalism has failed.” Well over 50 percent among all demographics answered the statement in the affirmative.

The figure was highest among youth in regional areas, at 64 percent, or almost two-thirds. The authors of the report were compelled to acknowledge that the figure was likely related to the “loss of industries and jobs” in regional areas, which have been hard hit by the decades-long assault on the working class, overseen by successive Labor and Liberal-National governments in collusion with the trade unions.

Respondents were also asked whether “ordinary workers are worse off today than they were 40 years ago.” Overall, more than 60 percent agreed with the proposition. The figure was the highest among working-class youth with no tertiary qualifications, at 67 percent, and among respondents in New South Wales, a state with one of the highest costs of living, at 69 percent.

The authors sought to ridicule the responses. Using misleading statistics on overall economic growth and consumer spending, designed to cover-over the growth of social inequality, they declared that “all workers, and indeed all Australians, are substantially better off than 40 years ago.”

This claim only underscores the ignorance and indifference of the authors, and the affluent elites to which they are connected, to the harsh social reality

confronting millions of ordinary people.

Australian society is more unequal than ever before, with the richest 1 percent controlling more wealth than the poorest 70 percent. Last year, wage growth reached its lowest level in recorded history, at just 1.9 percent, well-below the growing cost of living. Labour's share of national gross domestic product is smaller than ever before, while the percentage going to corporate profits is the highest ever.

Young workers face a labour market in which precarious casual and part-time employment makes up almost half the entire workforce. Weekend and overtime penalty wages are increasingly a thing of the past, as are holidays, sick days and other entitlements. For many young people, there is simply no prospect of a decent, well-paid, secure, full-time job.

The property bubble, fuelled by parasitic financial investment, has resulted in the lowest proportion of youth home ownership. Millions of workers are on the precipice of financial disaster, as a result of exorbitant mortgage and rent payments, which often consume 30 percent, or more, of household income. At the same time, all of the establishment parties are committed to deepening a decades-long onslaught on social spending.

Hanging over everything is the eruption of militarism, posing the threat of a global nuclear conflict. After 26 years of endless US-led wars, the major powers are responding to the deepest breakdown of the capitalism system since the 1930s by reviving militarism, in a bid to offset their own crisis at the expense of their rivals. Australia is at the centre of US-led preparations for conflict in the Asia-Pacific, directed above all, at China.

The interrelated manifestations of the capitalist crisis—war, inequality, austerity and a turn to authoritarian forms of rule—are politically radicalising workers and young people everywhere.

A poll commissioned by the right-wing Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation late last year found that 51 percent of American youth would rather live in a “socialist or communist country” than a capitalist one.

A poll conducted by the Union of European Broadcasters, in May 2017, revealed that over 53 percent of young people across Europe were prepared to participate in a “large-scale uprising” against their government. Those surveyed expressed hostility to the

growth of inequality, the dominance of politics by the corporate elite, the persecution of immigrants and the drive to war.

The authors of the CIS report highlight figures showing that many of the respondents knew little about the Russian Revolution, including the identity of its co-leader, Vladimir Lenin. This is hardly surprising. Young people have been cut off from the revolutionary traditions of the 20th century, amid a shift to the right by all of the old social-democratic and pseudo-left organisations, and a relentless campaign of historical falsification by the corporate media and in academia.

The CIS authors themselves recycle the lies by identifying socialism with Stalinism. In reality, the crimes of the Soviet bureaucracy, headed by Joseph Stalin, were the antithesis of the socialist and internationalist perspective that underlay the 1917 October Revolution in Russia—the first time the working class took political power.

The CIS report concludes on a note of fear, warning that the favourable view of socialism among young people “is no minor problem: one day such people may exercise a vote to impose such appalling doctrines, and their collateral damage, on our society.”

In fact, the socialistic sentiments increasingly animating young people are entirely justified. But a fight for socialism must be informed by the revolutionary experiences of the 20th century—above all, the lessons of the October revolution, embodied in the Trotskyist movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International. That is the only basis for a political struggle for a world free of war, inequality, and authoritarianism.



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