

Australian workers at mass rallies speak on growing inequality, denounce Labor

Our reporters
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WSWS reporters spoke to workers at “Change the Rules” rallies held by the Australian Council of Trade Unions in Sydney and Melbourne yesterday.

Workers denounced growing social inequality, the soaring cost of living and the corporate offensive against wages and jobs. Many agreed that Labor represented the interests of big business, and rejected the ACTU’s claims that Labor governments would resolve the issues confronting the working class.

Marlon, a carpenter in Sydney’s construction industry who is originally from Brazil, said: “We’re here to try to show the government that they cannot attack workers. Things are getting worse and worse every single year, because the cost of living is continuously going up and our wages just haven’t increased over the same time.

“It’s harder for the workers to pay the mortgages and keep a roof over their heads. Half of the population in Sydney pays rent, because housing prices have kept rising. There’s a whole section of workers who cannot afford to buy a house.

“Average house prices are over a million dollars, and mortgage costs keep growing. If you are earning between \$1000 and \$2000 a week after tax, how can you afford to pay for petrol, food and pay the mortgage? Even if you can, you can’t make any savings.

Asked about the implications of a crash of the inflated housing market, Marlon commented: “If the property and construction sector slows down, it is going to impact on all of us. What are we going to do? What are trades people going to do? Work at McDonalds? We can’t do that, we have families to support.

Marlon expressed his hostility to growing social inequality, stating: “The big companies are the ones making all of the money, and at the same time, the

government wants to attack workers, so that they can make even bigger profits.

“If workers earn over \$85,000 a year, they are in a high tax bracket. But what about the corporations? Last year, Apple made billions of dollars in profits and they didn’t pay any tax in Australia.”

Asked about his thoughts on the current Brazilian presidential elections, Marlon said: “I don’t support any of the parties or candidates. They are all corrupt. They represent themselves and the rich, who are the ones with the real power.

“I think it’s the same here. There is no real difference between Labor and the Liberals. Whoever is in the government they attack the workers so the rich get richer and the workers poorer. That’s how politics works now.”

Marlon also spoke out against the growing demonisation of immigrants, including by Labor, stating: “We are a country that has been made by immigrants, so they should leave us alone.”

In Melbourne, Sean spoke about the growing jobs crisis facing young workers.

“I’m very worried about my kids,” he said. “My daughter’s a casual at McDonald’s and she came home last night and said that McDonald’s is going to convert to fully-automated self-serve. They’re only going to have one or two staff manning the counters, so most of the workers won’t get shifts anymore. What a great start for young kids!

“The wages are pretty poor and she works hard and doesn’t get home some evenings till 2 a.m. And she’s only just turned 18 and then they just turned around in the school holidays and put all the older kids off and put all the younger ones on, because they can pay less. Everything is being automated. In ten years, the whole world is going to be casual labour.”

Tony, who has worked in the construction industry for more than thirty years, said in Sydney, “It’s just been getting worse and worse for years. The ruling elite are eroding workers’ rights, and they’re pushing the governments to do it.

“The governments control us. So the people that control the governments, the super-rich, the bankers and the corporate bosses, control us. For workers, the cost of living keeps going up, but politicians are voting for themselves to get wage rises every six months and corporate executives keep getting bonuses.”

Asked about the unions’ calls for the election of a Labor government, Tony said: “It’s not going to change anything. Labor, Liberal, it’s exactly the same thing, the same horse in a different colour.

“I know Fair Work laws were brought in by Labor. We elected them and then they kicked us in the teeth. They’re all politicians, but they’re only in there to line their own nests. They don’t care about the workers really. They say they do, but it’s all smoke and mirrors.”

Asked about the promotion of nationalism by Labor and the unions, both of which routinely blame foreign workers for unemployment and other social problems, Tony said: “The way the world is now, people are moving around the world all over the place. All the attacks on immigrants are crazy. It’s divide and conquer.”

When a WSWs reporter raised the necessity to unite internationally in the fight for workers’ governments, Tony replied, “That’s right, let’s get the whole world on board. People power, that’s the way we’re going to change things, and we need to make it a global thing. And we should have a workers’ government, a government that’s for the interests of every worker. If every worker across the country went on strike for a week, things would come to a halt. Then things might change.”



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