

Australian voters speak out

Workers and youth condemn major parliamentary parties

Our reporters
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Young voters and workers in Oxley, Parramatta, Hunter and Calwell, the working-class electorates where the SEP stood candidates in last Saturday's election, spoke out against the big business and pro-war policies of Australia's major political parties.

In Parramatta, **Jasmin**, a hairdresser from Penrith, denounced Australia's involvement in the US-led military interventions in the Middle East. "My brother, who has been in the army for about four years, has just been sent over to Iraq for his second deployment. It is pretty much belly-up over there but you never hear what's really happening on the news.

"It's confronting with my brother so many miles away and only able to talk to him once a week. Has something happened to him? Is there going to be a phone call saying that something has happened? I don't think these wars are anything to be fighting for. It's 100 percent about profit. My brother is on a US base over there at the moment, so it has nothing to do with Australia and everything to do with America.

"I've got two kids and it's a struggle every day, especially in my industry. Every second shop is a hairdresser or a barber, so there is definitely competition. Back when I was a kid you would be able to live weekly and be able to do holidays and those sorts of things, but now you live day to day.

"My partner and I both have to work so I miss out on the little things with my one-year-old daughter. There's only casual employment or part-time work and if you're not needed, you're not needed. Everyone can be replaced."

Emmanuel, originally from Ghana, spoke about the increasing government and media attacks on African youth. "I've been in Australia for 22 years. When I arrived here the media and the government made out that the enemy was Lebanese youth, then it became the Vietnamese, and now it's the Chinese and the Africans.

"They pick on immigrants to scare people and stop them from seeing that the government is refusing to help ordinary people with jobs, education, charities and other necessary things for society.

"[Homeland Affairs Minister Peter] Dutton says people in Melbourne can't go out at night to restaurants because of

African gangs. This is nonsense. The racism is for political reasons and they use it to suit their own purposes.

"When an African playing soccer for Australia scores a goal, the politicians and the media all cheer. They don't call him an African-Australian but an Australian. However, if a youth from the same background gets into some minor trouble with the police, then he is not an Australian but part of the 'African gang problem.' African kids, like all other kids in Australia, need jobs, they need to work and earn decent wages. What is the government doing about that?

Tracy from Calwell, in northwestern Melbourne, was concerned about the rise of right-wing racist parties. "I'm very much against racism," she said, "but I think it is embedding itself into politics these days. I'm worried about some of these other parties creeping in and racism becoming the norm in Australian politics."

Gurminder said: "I'm a taxi driver and suffering a lot—the issue for me is proper jobs. There's lots of educated people who do not have proper jobs. I was a skilled worker in India and my wife was a teacher but we can't find those jobs here. My wife's qualifications are not accepted here. There used to be many big companies here in Broadmeadows, like Fords and others, but they're now all closed.

"Many young people are learning skills in the education institutes and getting qualifications but there are no jobs. This is a very big problem. The government needs to create jobs in the manufacturing sector. We need big changes to have a good future."

Calwell is one of the safest Labor Party-held seats in Australia, but numerous workers expressed their hostility toward Labor, and many Labor voters had little confidence the party represented any genuine alternative to the Liberal-National Coalition.

"They are both the same—there is no difference between Labor and Liberal," **Mary**, an older worker, said. "I've worked in retail and Nestles for eight years and at Nabisco. Twenty years ago I could walk home and on the way submit job offers and be rung up the next morning for a new job. Now you work for someone for three months and after that they get rid of you.

“I have a child with an intellectual disability but she only gets the Newstart allowance, which means \$570 a fortnight. She cannot afford to leave home and I have to support her. But she wants an independent life. She can only get the dirtiest jobs around. There isn’t a party around that looks after people who need care. It is all about profit.”

Renee, a retail worker in her 20s, voted Labor. “I feel like the Liberal Party stands for big business, people who are already well-off... My mum is disabled, so I was a bit worried about the Liberals’ policies on disability payments. I want to be sure that money is being used properly to help people who are in need and it doesn’t really seem like they’re putting money into disability.”

Renee added: “I have heard about your party. I’m definitely interested in learning more about it, because it does sound like it stands to benefit me more than any other party does... It’s pretty much going to be Liberal or Labor, at the end of the day who wins the election, but I feel that neither of those two parties are doing anything when it comes to climate change and other issues.”

Emily said: “I just try to go for the ones [candidates] that are better for the workers. They need to make it easier for people. Kids are willing to work, but because they don’t have qualifications they are not getting a job, not giving them a chance.”

Others explained why they had voted for the Greens or for one of the right-wing populist parties.

“I’m not happy with the way the decisions are being made higher up,” **Amy**, a pathologist and former Labor voter, said. “I’d like someone in charge who thinks of the 98 percent, rather than the 2 percent of the highest earners in the country. I voted for the Greens. I do worry about what the future will be for my children.

“The Liberal Party wants to put less money and effort into renewable energy. They complain about crime but then they do nothing to help people who are doing it tough and steal to feed their families. It’s impossible with rent and food increases and paying more for electricity than ever. It’s a lot harder now than five years ago.

“We’re renting but we’d like to buy,” Amy said. “We’re not at the bottom and not at the top but with current house prices we can’t buy anywhere in the city. We’d have to go rural but then the further you go out you can’t get to a job.”

Kimberly voted for the Health Australia Party. “I didn’t vote for the main parties,” she explained, “because they don’t care about families or the most vulnerable people in Australia. That is very concerning and I don’t think it is going to get any better.

“I want to get some of the smaller parties in that care about people. I feel that smaller parties advocate for people above business. One of the things that I felt wasn’t dealt with in the election was homelessness. That is far more visible now—people struggling to pay their rent, people not being able to buy their

first home. There is not just a single issue with housing. It is a much wider issue and it is not getting better.

Julie, a former Telstra worker, voted for billionaire Clive Palmer’s right-wing United Australia Party. “I don’t think these elections are going to change anything,” she explained. “All the main parties—Labor and Liberal—make promises all the time, but they never come into fruition. My experience has been that workers’ rights have been eroded due to a lot of companies being privatised.”

Commenting on the trade unions, she added, “The unions are out of it, they no longer have the power to support the workers’ rights. I was unfairly dismissed from Telstra and I’m still fighting for wages that are owed to me due to being pressured to resign and discriminated against because of my age. I’ve been asked by many people if I approached the union about this, but I didn’t even bother. I’ve seen that the unions side with the corporations.”

Kate, a kindergarten teacher, said: “I wanted to vote for a party that seems to be doing something about climate change, so I voted for the Greens and for you, [the SEP] because your name says you’re fighting for social equality.

“Labor and Liberal don’t care about climate change. Climate change can’t be solved with a bunch of politicians who are not accountable to anyone, and that’s why I think that what Julian Assange did in speaking out is great. The world needs many more Julian Assanges. That he should face punishment for revealing the truth is wrong.”

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