

Workers speak on Australian election: “It doesn’t matter who gets in, the whole system is broken”

Our reporters

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Socialist Equality Party campaigners spoke with a broad range of workers and young people, including factory workers, labourers, drivers, medical workers, university students and single parents as they were voting in the Australian federal election last Saturday.

Today the *World Socialist Web Site* is publishing text and video interviews from polling booths in working-class suburbs of Melbourne, the Victorian state capital. Later this week we will feature interviews from a cross-section of voters in New South Wales and Queensland.

The overwhelming majority denounced the Liberal-National and Labor parties. Few believed that these parties or the election would resolve any of the issues facing working people. Many voiced their concerns about the rapidly worsening conditions of life for ordinary people, rising militarism, the consequences of the US-led NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, Australian government endorsement of imprisonment and persecution of Julian Assange, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

At Cranbourne, an outer south-eastern Melbourne suburb several young people said they were only voting to avoid a fine under Australia’s compulsory voting system. Some said they voted informally as a protest, scrawling messages of hostility on their ballot papers.

Keith, 42, who works at an plumbing manufacturing company decided to vote for the SEP after hearing about the party’s program as he went to vote.

“I put you guys first, Labor second, and I forget what I did after that,” he said after casting his ballot. “Everything is now skewed towards the rich in this country. Things are getting too hard for the average worker to make ends meet—the cost of living, fuel, and pretty much everything across the board—so we need people like you guys in there to shake things up a bit. You need to raise the minimum wage. I think this time, with the pandemic, there will be a lot more votes for you guys, for minor parties. There’s a big swing away from the two major parties,” he said.

Asked about the war in Ukraine, Keith responded, “It’s a mess, it’s disgusting, it’s horrible. I don’t agree with sending money over there for arms. It’s nuts that the Biden administration is spending \$40 billion to give Ukraine weapons when you have so much social inequality in the United States. They don’t even have universal healthcare, for goodness sake...”

“All this war mongering and carrying on with China is complete stupidity. It was [Australian Prime Minister] Morrison who started all this rubbish with China and it really irritated me. Just let China be.

Morrison was just following lockstep behind the United States.”

Shane, a roadworker originally from New Zealand, said that he worked 12 to 13 hours a day and was concerned about the rising cost of housing.

“I’m 52 years old, divorced and I’ll never buy another house for the rest of my life. House prices are ridiculous,” he said. “Twenty years ago, my then wife and I built a house and land package in Hampton Park for \$210,000. She’s just sold it for \$670,000. I’ve got kids—26-, 22-, and 16-years-old—and there’s no way in the world they’ll buy a house. My son lives with his fiancée, and for a two-bedroom unit they pay \$700 per week. He works in a warehouse, and she works too. They can’t afford to have kids.

“We’re in a deadly roundabout, nobody’s helping. These pricks sitting there in Canberra won’t do anything about it. It doesn’t matter who gets in, the whole system is broken. You vote for someone, but it doesn’t matter who gets in they all line their own pockets.

“Our pay has gone down. I’m earning less now on an hourly rate than I was six years ago. It went from \$42 per hour to now \$36 per hour. Where’s the government helping out with the cost of petrol? We need to wipe the government altogether and start again.”

Rachael, an overdose prevention clinician, said, “I see people struggling with disadvantage, mental health, trauma, struggling to get out of addiction, but there’s no money for the sector. We need huge change in that area.”

Asked if there were any parties in the election proposing the necessary changes, Rachael replied, “Well, I can see the Socialist Equality Party has a move to make those changes. I don’t want to vote for Labor, Liberal, Greens because they all care for the people that have the money and make the money. They don’t care for the disadvantaged.”

Rachel said she opposed war and added, “What’s war going to achieve? You’ve got innocent people who are victims of a war that’s not theirs. We’re always told that there’s no money for not-for-profits and public housing. There is no public housing. And yet they can chuck \$40 billion into a war.

“Thousands of people are living on the street. People are being put up in motels funded by not-for-profits, because there’s no public housing. The pandemic made a small improvement for the homeless but then they kicked people out of motels. They rang everybody that was in a motel over the pandemic and said, ‘time to go now, back to the street.’

“So many problems can be solved through housing,” she continued. “The first step to solving addiction or mental health problems is

having a roof over your head, so people can feel safe and secure and have the ability to make a change.”

“Two years ago, I was in a position to buy a house and had a deposit. Now I’m priced out of the market. Absolutely no chance I’ll be able to buy a house because the prices are skyrocketing. I’ve just been given a 60-day notice to vacate from the place I’m renting, because the owner wants to sell. I now have to pay an extra \$60 per week rent. I’m currently paying over \$400 a week, soon to be nearly \$500, and I’ve got two kids,” Rachael said.

Hecta, a former engineer, spoke with SEP campaigners at Tarneit, a new outer-western Melbourne suburb that is home to many immigrants and refugees from Africa and South Asia.

“They [the parliamentary parties] are much of a muchness in this campaign, always criticising each other but at the end of the day they will adopt the same policies, he said.

“I’m for the workers—there’s a lack of wage rises, including under Labor who used to look after us. Successive governments are responsible for this. I’m pro worker, but there is not much separating the parties at all. Australia will follow the US into war again—they’ve done this with Afghanistan and Iraq.”

Rick, a warehouse worker, said there is not “a huge deal of difference” between the major parliamentary parties and spoke about the rising cost of living.

“Inflation has gone up over 5 percent, so living costs are up but wages are down. Where I work, we have 80 percent casuals, so they can get rid of them whenever they want at the warehouse,” he said.

“It’s hard to get full-time work now, and casuals are unprotected, they have to work public holidays. Costs with kids are hefty and I’ve been thinking that I need to get a second job, or work over weekends, but then what sort of life do you have?” he asked.

Oktay, a young truck driver, spoke to SEP campaigners at Meadow Heights, which has a large working class migrant community, including workers from Turkey and Cyprus, and others from the Middle East. The area, which includes Broadmeadows, has been decimated by deindustrialisation and the destruction of the car industry nearly a decade ago, with widespread poverty and large-scale unemployment.

Oktay said he was most concerned about “health, well-being, education and financial stability” and denounced the government’s vast military expenditure. “The military has always been about money. And the fact that they’re refusing to spend on the people is rough, because some people really need it,” he said.

“There’s a lot of propaganda,” he stated, referring to US interventions in the Middle East. “There’s a lot of blood being spilt for unnecessary reasons, but this is all due to the higher powers in place.”

These sentiments were echoed by **Jamal**, a student, who said money should be spent on “schools, hospitals and stuff that will actually be useful. It’s horrible that so many people around the world are going without food. War is not good for anyone. Why do they keep causing war?”

The SEP spoke with two sisters **Marwa** and **Rashida**, of Lebanese migrant parents.

Rashida, a 28 year old public service worker, denounced the Liberal-National and Labor parties. “I don’t agree with them. Their values don’t align with mine. I would not vote for any of them,” she said.

These parties, she continued, were “not for actual democracy” and “not for the people. You see that in the kind of policies they’re

putting out there and the ‘change’ they’re putting out there. But nothing’s really changing. It’s all like, ‘oh, how can I sell myself to you and get votes to stay in power?’

“Homelessness is increasing. Mental health issues are on the rise. I don’t agree with the approach they’re taking towards mental health. You’re not helping by just saying, ‘Okay, we accept you’ and that’s it. They’re not actually helping people.”

Rashida added: “I think that most governments are actually puppets. Australia is a capitalist country, so everything’s about making money. War makes money and causing war also makes money. So, it’s a situation where it doesn’t matter who you vote for. The people behind it are really the ones that are making policies.”

Marwa, 27, and a hospitality worker, spoke about the rising cost of living.

“The government’s not really doing anything to help that. There’s more homelessness now. Poverty is rising even in the middle class. I feel like there’s barely any middle class. There’s just like lower middle class and just lower. And then the rich just get richer and the poor get poorer,” she said.

The cost of living was rising “because of capitalism and governments and the people in power, it’s to make more money. They don’t really care about the little guys just trying to get a living. They just do whatever they can to exploit the working class and continue to get rich from that.

“Everything is modelled around the rich. The system exists pretty much just to exploit others. That’s really the bottom line, that’s what capitalism is. Every time we make a joke about how something’s not working, we just say, ‘It’s capitalism, it’s because of capitalism’ and even though we say it jokingly, there’s truth to it,” she said.

Referring to the difficult situation facing her relatives in Lebanon, she said the Lebanese government “is practically non-existent.” It was not purchasing and supplying pharmaceuticals to ordinary people, meaning that her family had to send medicines and money to their relatives.

“Sometimes I have to send money over to pay for electricity. I feel like all governments at this point are just in it for themselves and really not for the people. There are no leaders, there’s just people who exploit,” she said.

Referring to the rising war dangers, Marwa said, “American imperialism definitely benefits from war and won’t stop this because it’s getting rich from it. It doesn’t care about the people getting hurt in other countries, and how it’s affecting the society.”



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