

Australian election: Workers and youth speak out over rising inflation, war dangers and COVID-19

Our reporters

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Today the *World Socialist Web Site* is publishing interviews from voters in Bankstown and Parramatta, two of Sydney's largest working-class suburbs. Yesterday we featured comments from voters in Melbourne.

Like thousands of others across the country, workers and youth in Bankstown and Parramatta voiced their disgust with the major political parties, pointing to falling living standards and increasingly difficult working conditions.

Several spoke out in support of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange who remains imprisoned in the UK's Belmarsh Prison, facing extradition to the US for exposing American war crimes. They noted the complicity of Australian governments, Labor and Liberal-National, in this persecution of an Australian citizen and journalist.

Angelique, an IT worker with relatives in Syria, spoke to SEP campaigners after seeing that they were wearing "Free Julian Assange" t-shirts.

"Julian Assange is a hero in a lot of ways. He exposed the truth and a lot of atrocities and war crimes, and should be protected. He's close to being extradited to America, which is not going to be good for him. There needs to be more media coverage of him rather than the Johnny Depp-Amber Heard case, which is a private matter," she said.

"Assange is the elephant in the room but other parties probably don't want to be too controversial because he's exposed things to do with America. These parties don't want to upset the American government in case they get to be the next Australian government," she commented.

"There's been a cold war going on between the US and Russia for years," Angelique said, referring to the war in Ukraine. She stated that the conflict was surrounded by "a whole lot of propaganda."

America is "scared for its interests," she continued. "It wants to be the strongest force in the world. That's why they are comparing Putin with Hitler, which they always do, as well as claiming that Russia is committing human rights abuses or is going to use nuclear weapons. This is not necessarily true, there's a lot more going on there than they let on.

"Ukraine will be the one that suffers in the end because

America is just going to leave them when it doesn't suit them anymore. America is using other countries to fight the war for them in the same way they did with Syria. They were paying people from other countries to fight the war in Syria. It's playing the same dirty game in Ukraine but expects no one to know just because the characters have changed.

"America was behind the creation of ISIS. They created a puppet and tried to pull the strings but ISIS had their own motivations and America couldn't deal with that and so they disowned them. The US used people's religions to manipulate them into fighting and now they wash their hands clean, but the blood is still there," she said.

Angelique warned that direct conflict between the US and Russia would lead to World War III. "I'm just worried about what's going to happen and whether America and Russia are going to resort to other measures like biological weapons," she said.

Susan, a childcare worker with a teaching degree and three young children, said, "The situation in childcare isn't getting any better. We're at the bottom and always overlooked but we deserve equal pay because we do just as much work as a teacher and anyone else.

"I want to give my children the best in education, but how can I do that with such low pay? There's not enough pay for teachers, nurses and the things that matter. I don't think that's right or fair," she added.

Susan spoke about COVID-19 and the dangerous reopening of schools. "There was no protection. The authorities just handed out a few RAT tests, which doesn't solve any problems, especially when there was no-one policing who was doing it and who wasn't. Kids were going to school sick," she said.

"I'm an essential worker and understand that other people were essential workers and that we had to remain open for them but what about my health and safety? I ended up contracting COVID from a child who came to the centre and I was pregnant at the time, so I took COVID home to my kids as well. It is more about making money, and safety wasn't a priority," Susan said.

A **biomedical engineer** who works at a south-eastern Sydney hospital but wanted to remain anonymous explained some of his experiences with COVID-19.

“I work in biomed and saw a lot of COVID patients. We look after the medical equipment, especially the ventilators, so we are one of the components to save lives in the hospital. It was very stressful, even for the nursing staff,” he said.

“Technicians don’t deal directly with the patients but if the number of patients increase, there’s an increase in equipment and so we need to increase the number of staff in our department. This will be an ongoing issue until this has been resolved because this pandemic is ongoing,” he said.

Gloria is originally from Ghana and said the election would change nothing for workers. “Whether Labor or the Liberals, it’s always the same. I just know that not much is going to change. For the low-income and average income earners, we don’t matter at all. It’s not about us. It’s about the rich. They keep getting richer while the poor keep getting poorer.”

Referring to the rising cost of living, she said, “I have two sons and live with my mum. Before, with \$250 a week, you could buy groceries, now you’re looking at around \$600 a fortnight, or \$300 a week, and that doesn’t even last very long, especially with kids going to school. Everything is expensive and my mum just had a rent increase.

“You work harder, get experience, and study. I haven’t finished my studies but education is just bills and bills—it’s literally a business—so I had to drop out because my mum needed help to pay the bills for the house.

“I’ve been working as a manager at KFC and been there since I was 14. You can never rely on one job, not in this country, you need two jobs, some people even do three jobs.

“The people up there in the head office [at KFC] don’t care about you at all. All they care about is the money. We’re doing the job, they’re just up there testing the recipes and checking which ones to put on the menu, but we do everything,” she said.

Jorella, a NSW rail train guard, spoke with SEP campaigners in Parramatta. “Rent is up, petrol up, everything is going up and it’s a bit of a struggle. I work in the rail industry and we’re still fighting for a new enterprise bargaining agreement. We’re fighting for a 3 percent annual pay increase, but inflation is 5.1 percent. Right now, we’re at a standstill. Our enterprise agreement ended around June last year, so from then until now there’s been a pay freeze.

“The union caves in quite a bit and we’re not really getting anywhere. We need stronger strikes and industrial action to make a point. Most of the industrial action we’re doing is just to inconvenience higher management. We do that by sticking to certain diagrams, no transpositions or anything like that. Transpositions are when you can change the stops on a train or work a different diagram [timetable] altogether.

“We do get cleared legally for 24-hour actions, but we see that people need to get to work, a strike is a bad thing to do to

customers, so instead we take four hours, in non-peak times. “As rail workers, we work for the public. We transport so many people every day who need to go to work, to their appointments, to the doctor. There isn’t really a ‘proper’ or ‘right’ time for us to strike ever. We work through floods, through COVID, through everything.

“We were in a pay freeze throughout COVID, where we had to go and risk our lives and our families’ health to go to work and deal with the public. They brought in electronic whistles for guards so we don’t have to lift our masks up, but it’s still frightening. Eliminating COVID-19 is possible, but I don’t think the government is willing to fork out the money for it.

“I believe striking teachers and nurses are doing good work and I actually joined in a few of the picket lines. The unity of the working class is a must. There’s power in numbers and it’s better to be backed up by different people and groups that all want the same thing. That’s where we get our real power,” Jorella said.

Emmanuel, a courier, said: “If you have a family, you feel pressure to give them a good life. As a father, I worry about the next generation and what they’re going to do. There’s nothing for them. You want your children to have a good education, but if you don’t have money, it’s hard to give them the education that you want.

“You worry about rent because you don’t have the money to buy a house and you live from pay cheque to pay cheque. Sometimes when my pay comes, after rent and bills I don’t even have enough to feed the family.

“I get up at 6:30 am and go to work and come home around six, sometimes seven o’clock. I get paid per delivery, so if I don’t go to work, I don’t get paid.”

Commenting on Labor’s refusal to increase the poverty-level JobSeeker welfare payment, Emmanuel said, “They will be hurting a lot of people, destroying people. Some people spend a year looking for a job, or sometimes you start a job and after a month they say, ‘No more job for you.’

“The rich always look after the rich, while the poor are neglected. I support the SEP’s call for the working class to take power because I believe with unity, there is a better future ahead.”



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