

Australian election: Workers oppose war, the persecution of Assange and rising living costs

Our reporters
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Today the *World Socialist Web Site* is publishing election interviews with workers and youth voting on Saturday at Inala, a working-class western suburb of Brisbane, the Queensland state capital, and at Chittaway Bay in Newcastle, New South Wales. On Tuesday we featured comments from voters in Melbourne and yesterday from Sydney.

Mia and **Christopher** came to the Inala polling booth not knowing who to vote for because it was “all empty promises.” They explained their financial stress since Christopher was sacked from his job after he suffered an illness.

“I would say to Scott Morrison, ‘Come and live our life for a week!’ Sometimes my partner doesn’t eat dinner, so that me and my son can eat. You know how sad that is... It’s not like we are lazy people, we are more than capable. I have diplomas and everything, and he’s qualified, he is a qualified tradie, he can do anything. He can fix your roof, do your garden, anything you want,” **Mia** said.

Christopher drew a parallel between the refusal of governments to protect working people from the COVID-19 pandemic and the refusal of employers to ensure safety in workplaces.

“The dust at my last job at a glass factory was horrendous. They gave us masks but didn’t give us anything to clean the masks, so we were inhaling dust. My first month there, they never even gave me a mask,” he said.

Christopher agreed with the SEP’s election statement demand for wages increases to keep up with inflation. “The money that people are getting from their wages isn’t enough, it really just isn’t enough, because costs are just going up and up,” he said. “Look at fuel for example, it’s over \$2 [a litre]. People can’t even afford fuel just to get to work... From empty, it took my car \$150 to fill it up. It used to cost me \$80 to fill it up. We need to fix up people’s wages.”

Referring to Australia’s inflated housing costs, he added, “I know a lot of homeless people in Inala, like most of them are mates of mine, and they just can’t get a house... I have only known one person out of 50 to get a house. Even then he lost that house about six months later, because he wasn’t getting enough money to pay for it, and he was working a high-end job. It was a really shoddy place and he was paying around \$560 a week.”

Mia added: “Our situation at home is affecting our relationship and everything. We can’t afford to get food or even afford bread sometimes. I had to get a \$500 loan just to get us food for the kid and for us. I’m in that much debt at 22 years old, because I am trying to feed my family.”

Barry, a labourer, said he voted Labor, just to get rid of Prime Minister Scott Morrison. “If I didn’t get fined for not voting, I wouldn’t bother coming at all. They’re both as bad as each other.

Labor is doing pretty much the same as the Liberals, but I can’t stand looking at Scomo [Scott Morrison].”

Asked about the soaring cost of living, he said: “The cost of living is stuffed. I’m not buying a house anytime soon! It’s harder to live, but we have it better compared to the rest of the world, so I don’t like to complain too much. I agree with you that the rich are getting richer at our expense. But what do you do?

“Hopefully next time you can get in. I think Labor will get in and do stuff all, but at least it’s better than Scomo getting back in and doing stuff all. I voted for you as number 2. I voted for Labor because I want to get rid of Scomo and that’s the most effective way to do it.”

Asked if he had any confidence that Labor was going to be any better, **Barry** said: “No. No.”

Nick, a retired electrician originally from Russia, was waiting in line to vote when he called us over to discuss the treatment of Julian Assange and to find out more about the SEP’s policies. He was one of many who supported the fight to free Assange, which was prominent in the SEP campaign.

“Australians take note of who has locked up Julian Assange. He’s trying to tell the world the truth and they’ve locked him up in jail for years on end, and now they want to deport to the USA for a lifetime jail sentence. What sort of Australian government is it that that allows an Australian citizen to be controlled by corporations and other powers to be put away for so long, just because he’s telling truth?... Unlock him, release him and bring him home,” **Nick** said.

Asked about Labor’s role in aiding Assange’s persecution and refusing to defend him, **Nick** said: “They’re all the same. They’re all on the side of Western politics. They only look after themselves and the big corporations. They don’t look after the ordinary man.”

Later, after voting, **Nick** stopped for a further discussion. In particular, he denounced the US-led expansion of NATO to Russia’s borders as a bid to overturn the Putin government and establish US control over Russia. He accused the US of being prepared to trigger a nuclear war.

Max, a young worker currently on a disability pension, had questions about the SEP’s election statement, which he had received in his letterbox. He said he agreed with the statement but was not sure how its socialist program could be achieved.

“I think we need to get rid of Scomo as a priority because they are just making everything worse for the planet and for workers’ rights and everything. It’s hard to say if a Labor government backed by the Greens would make any difference because we haven’t had one recently, but climate change has been a threat since I was a little kid, and no one has done anything. It’s all about profit. But I’m here to vote... I’d love a revolution but you have to vote,” he said.

Max ridiculed Labor's climate change policy—"hey, let's stop emissions by 2050, when it's too late"—and commented on Labor's similarity to the Liberals.

"Labor should be doing better than the Liberals, but they're not. It's just not good enough to vote for the lesser evil, that's just stupid. Labor's not even lesser evil anymore. Both parties are exactly the same," he said.

SEP Senate candidate Mike Head discussed Labor's pro-business program and its historic role as the party of war, the US military alliance and stifling the struggles of workers.

Max responded with the comment: "I say if you [the SEP] can win, that's great, but I still have to vote Greens and Labor somewhere, unfortunately. It seems doomed on the climate-wise, but we have to do what we can." He agreed to have further discussion and signing up to the SEP mailing list, wrote: "Revolution soon/now please."

SEP campaigners at the Chittaway Bay polling booth in Newcastle were approached by **Bruce**, a retiree, who was attracted by their t-shirts calling for the release of Assange.

"As far as I'm concerned, Assange told the truth. Governments have just been cruel bastards to him because he showed the truth about their wars," Bruce said.

"The refugees that are fleeing from wars are also being treated cruelly when all they want is a better life, like the [Tamil refugee family] from Biloela, who were living in the community for years and raising their kids. They just want a better life but the government wants to send them back. Labor and Liberal both support boat turnbacks but I think anyone who wants to come here for a better life should be able to. We should bring them over here for nothing," he added.

In comments on the war in Ukraine, Bruce said, "I hate to think where this war is going to end. It could end up in nuclear war. It's a proxy war for the US. All the major parties want to spend more on the military, it's unbelievable. What's the use of Australia getting half-a-dozen nuclear submarines and spending more on weapons?"

"At the same time, they've been cutting back on health spending, on Medicare. The government can spend money on war and destruction but nothing on what people actually need," he said.

Benjamin an electrical and computer science student at the University of Newcastle and a casual worker at the giant Coles retailer chain. A first-time voter, Benjamin said he was sometimes working 60 hours a week and was concerned about the rising cost of living.

"I find the elections very divisive and it's always the same two parties. This means smaller parties like the SEP have an opportunity because the issues of war, cost of living, inflation, mortgage rates aren't being solved by the major parties.

"I agree that whatever government is formed, workers will be under attack. I feel like, a lot of pressure is building up. It's a matter of when that pressure will pop," he said.

Andrew from Chittaway Bay said: "I wake up every morning and try to find out more about what's going on in the world, and I'm a world news person. The US, Australia and other governments are spending money on the war in Ukraine saying it's for humanitarian reasons but the sanctions on Russia have caused food shortages. People are starving in Sri Lanka.

"I don't support Putin, but the US is lying about Russian aggression, they're the ones causing the aggression. They're funding a war, why aren't they funding peace? All that money could be spent on fixing things, like healthcare. I'm not working right now, I need a hip operation that I've been waiting on for nearly two and a half

years, because COVID hit, and I've been thrown to the back of the line. I'm only deteriorating because they're not doing the procedure.

"All these parties, Labor, Liberal, the Greens, are controlled by big business—all these big companies own everything and control everything. They want more money and don't care if they depopulate the world in the process. I've got as much right as one of these rich people sitting up there making decisions about the lives of me and my family.

"I agree with you that workers in Ukraine and Russia should unite and we should fight to stop funding war in this country. There's a lot of opposition to war, I can see that. I hadn't heard of the SEP or the *World Socialist Web Site*, but I'm interested in reading more. I'm always looking for an alternative," he said.

Rob, an electrician, said: "I definitely want to see the Liberal government go because of the corruption and the scandals. There's a list a mile long and I don't trust them at all.

Labor is still a major party, but these parties take too much for granted. They don't work to benefit workers and the people, they work to benefit big business, the corporations and industries. I think a hung parliament would be a good thing."

Asked about pledges by Labor and Liberal to maintain unprecedented military budgets at the cost of social spending, he replied, "This shows who's behind their campaigns, it's the big donors and military industrial complexes. There needs to be more visibility around this, so you know what you're voting for.

"There's nothing to address the cost of living, which is going up. Housing prices are through the roof and vacancy rates are at record lows so even if you want to rent there's not much availability.

"I agree that workers need to take matters into their own hands but how do we do that? I was in the Electrical Trades Union when I was an apprentice but stopped my membership because I didn't feel I needed it for the cost, it wasn't doing anything for me."

After SEP campaigners explained the party's establishment of rank-and-file committees, controlled by workers themselves and independent of the unions, to take forward workers struggles, Rob said, "I'm interested, definitely, and now that I'm getting older, I'm thinking more about how we need to do something."



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