NSW election: Australian workers and youth speak about COVID, war and social crisis

Our reporters
28 March 2023

Socialist Equality Party members and supporters campaigned at polling booths in Sydney, Lismore, Newcastle and the Central Coast for Saturday's New South Wales (NSW) state election.

Today, the *World Socialist Web Site* is publishing comments from workers and young people in Newcastle, the second largest city in NSW, and the Central Coast region, just north of Sydney. In recent days, we have featured coverage from flood-stricken Lismore, in the state's North, and the south-west Sydney electorate of Bankstown.

The official election campaign was characterised by the unanimity of the parliamentary parties on virtually every front and a conspiracy of silence on all the major political issues.

In discussions with SEP campaigners, however, workers and young people expressed deep concern about war, the worsening social crisis, as well as the ongoing COVID pandemic. Many were hostile to Labor, the Liberal-Nationals and the Greens, and held little hope that the election would do anything to resolve these existential questions.

Workers and youth responded positively to the perspective put forward by the SEP, of the need to build a revolutionary party of the working class and an international anti-war movement, based on a fight against capitalism.

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Richard, a carer, said: "I think war is not good for the working class and that the money the federal Labor government is spending on war could be used in other ways, like on healthcare and education.

"They're making out China to be this big bad wolf, but it's not escalating the war in Ukraine, it's the US that's doing that. And the US doesn't like when someone exposes them, like Julian Assange and whistleblowers exposed their war crimes. Both Labor and Liberal have refused to help Assange, but the truth will come out in the end.

"I think it's a good idea to have an international movement for the working class against war and for democratic rights, for workers to unite; it makes sense. Look what's happening in France, with workers on strike against pension cuts. Workers don't want to be dictated to, it's supposed to be a democracy but it's not."

Tom, a construction worker, said: "I don't think a war with China is going to solve anything; I'm completely against it. The billions of dollars the government is spending on the military could be better spent elsewhere, like on hospitals, schools, funding for the homeless. Housing and the cost of living is a real pinch for a lot of people, including myself. You go to the shops and the price of bread goes up, 50 cents to a dollar, but our pay doesn't go up, and our rent ends up increasing as well because of inflation and interest rates.

"The government should be focused on that and not going to war with another country; their priorities are all wrong. It's about power and money, war generates so much money for them, like the US, with all its wars in the Middle East, it just makes them richer. It's the same in Ukraine, the US will keep sending more weapons over to escalate the war further; they're not trying to create peace.

"The working class isn't being considered at all. Workers are going on strike here too, they just want better pay and to be equal with the cost of living. We deserve better. I support workers building their own party, you have my vote on that, 100 percent.

Martin, a retired construction worker from Bateau Bay, said: "I think we're close to another world war. I

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agree Julian Assange should be freed, both the major parties are opposed to free speech.

"Politicians are only in it for themselves and the rich. I've been denied a pension. I moved over here in 1966 from England, worked hard and saved up all my life, seven days a week, but because I own a house that's rented, I can't get a pension. All these politicians have houses all over the place, hundreds of thousands in super... millions, where's the justice in that?

"Look at the flood victims up in Lismore. What help did they get? Politicians flew over in a plane and thought, 'oh, too bad!' This is supposed to be a wealthy country, you've got people living on the street here, and this inflation business... this affects people on the bottom of the list the most. Who is causing it? The big companies, the supermarkets are causing it."

Douglas, a small business owner, said: "I don't like anything about war. The US wants us to go to war against China, whenever the US wants war, they always just order it and we send our troops.

"The Labor party is not helping, they are putting a big bullseye on our back. And if there are nuclear weapons involved, in a nuclear war, no one can win!

"Labor has also refused to free Assange. He's an Australian citizen, he should be brought back to Australia. What he's got is the truth, the truth of what the US did and their war crimes, and Australia was part of those crimes too. It's just wrong that he's imprisoned because he exposed the truth. He should be freed immediately."

Celeste, a university student said: "The government's preparations for war haven't been mentioned in any of this election campaign by Labor or Liberal—that's not okay. I think it's bad that the Socialist Equality Party, which is telling people about this spending on war, doesn't get shown in the media when Labor and Liberal do, so people aren't familiar with parties like the SEP and can't vote for them. In a way I think that's deliberate.

"We've got so many Australians struggling with the cost of living rising, we've got a horrible rental crisis at the moment, people can't buy homes.

"At the moment, I'm living in an apartment building where you have to earn under $50,000. I'm about to graduate university and go into a $70,000 starting wage, and with the rental crisis at the moment I've got no idea where I'm going to go.

"If they've got billions of dollars to spend on weapons to help other countries with war and even starting their own wars, against China, then they've got money to increase wages here and to spend on health and education.

"I hadn't heard of you guys before but I will definitely vote for you because everything that you've said is what we need and what I want."

Scott, a casual high school teacher with 30 years' experience, said: "I describe the situation in public education as parlous. There is a massive shortage of teachers at the moment, I'm a casual and I am never short of work."

On wage and funding cuts to public education, Scott said: "I think it is privatisation by stealth, to make public education so unpalatable, that the vast majority of people who can afford private will want to send their kids to private schools. Why else would you eviscerate the public system? All sides of politics don't really care about public education.

"One of the problems is that there are so many different struggles, so many people confront the housing crisis. I'm currently renting nearby here and in six months my lease is up. I am spending so much of my time and resources to try to find an affordable place—people don't have time to engage in these other debates. Compared to shelter and water, education is somewhat secondary, but it shouldn't be secondary, it should be first-rate.

"I'm a member of the Teachers Federation, out of habit more than anything else. I can't argue with the point that the trade union officials don't do anything really to address the concerns of teachers."

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