

Australia: Workers speak on social crisis, Gaza genocide at Werribee by-election

Our reporters
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A by-election in Melbourne last Saturday further underscored the crisis of the Labor Party and the entire political establishment.

While the poll was for the seat of Werribee in the Victorian state parliament, the result had national implications, with the federal Labor government widely reviled and a national election due by May.

Labor suffered an almost 17 percent swing against it, compared with its 2022 result in the working-class seat in Melbourne's west. The result remains in doubt, however, because the opposition Liberal Party gained a swing of less than four percent. Independent and third-party candidates received more than 42 percent of the primary vote, signalling widespread hostility to the two-party system.

Reporters for the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to voters about the issues that animated them.

Daniel, who is completing an aged care course and is originally from Sudan, was asked about Trump's plan to ethnically-cleanse and seize the Gaza Strip. "A lot of killing is going on," he said. "I was a refugee, and Trump is a real problem because you run away from a war-torn place and then someone like Trump will send you back there."

Daniel said he is looking for work and is currently forced to survive on the JobSeeker unemployment payment. He receives just \$748 every fortnight, but "where I live the rent is about \$500 a week and I live in one bedroom, sharing because of the money situation."

He described his experience at previous jobs, saying "I've worked in meatworks and in different casual positions. Some of them have conditions that are almost impossible. I worked in a place in Thomastown where it was so cold, and you had to work in a freezer. I could barely move my hands. I'm doing aged care studies hopefully to get a job later on."

On the major political parties, he said "I don't think whoever gets in will make things better."

Christelle, a mother who used to work in a processing factory, said, "The cost of living has really affected me a lot. In the last two years I had to shift into a sharing accommodation situation. I live with my two brothers and my family because I can't afford the same things I used to. It's hard to buy meat now, instead you have to buy noodles and meat in a can."

She said that in Werribee healthcare is a major problem. Her son has a problem with his breathing, including in his sleep. But "there is a waiting list for three years and they say there is nothing they can do. All I'm told is that I have to be in the private healthcare system, but the trouble is I can't afford it." She noted healthcare is not provided equally and that "if the government gives more in one area, they then take away something else in another."

"I hope whoever comes in will do something to help us, but it is doubtful."

Justin, a landscape gardener, said the main issue confronting him is housing. He had been trying to buy a house for three years, but could not due to the cost. "A mortgage around here is about \$1,200 per month. That's about \$300 to \$400 a week. I'm a big believer in a wealth cap. Once someone gets \$1 billion, that's where it should stop and everything else should go to health, education and other services."

"I don't think there are any real differences between the political parties at all," Justin said. He was "scared of our government following what Trump does, it's frightening."

Kath, who works in the court system, said it is "getting a little harder to live." She said that she supported Labor, because she was fearful that a conservative government would "make it very difficult

for normal working people.”

But asked about Labor’s support for the Israeli genocide in Gaza, she stated: “I don’t agree with that. I think what’s happening over there is atrocious and it’s a war crime. [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu should be arrested and locked up and all the Western leaders for supporting that.

“We’ve seen it before, with what happened in Iraq twenty years ago, with Bush, Howard and Blair. They should have all been arrested and locked up.” Pointing to the suppression of this history by the media, she said “everyone’s got a very short memory of how things have happened in the past. They’re saying, ‘Never forget,’ but that’s exactly what we’re seeing, *deja vu* all over again.”

Asked about a right-wing campaign against purportedly rising crime rates, which was raised by a number of candidates in the by-election, she said that “if the general public knew what we see and hear [in the courts] every day, I think their views would be somewhat changed.” Anti-social behaviour, she stated, was very frequently because “people are just desperate for cash.” She opposed calls for mandatory sentencing and said “you’ve got to work with these people. You can’t just sweep it all under the rug.”

Aftab, who is 45 and works in the IT industry, said the main issue was to reduce the cost of living. He said there needed to be a “lowering of the price of housing, something to make things more affordable for the common people.” Rising interest rates were “squeezing more money from my savings” through higher mortgage repayments. “Prices are going up faster than wages; wages don’t go up 20 percent, like prices. Inflation is too much.”

When asked what had happened to the wealth from lower real incomes, Aftab said it had gone “into the pockets of the powerful.” He said he is “not into politics” but when asked what should be done, he said “the working class needs to have a party that represents them, to help people improve their lifestyle and create more jobs.”

When told about the perspective of the Socialist Equality Party, for the development of an independent political movement of the working class, against all the establishment parties and capitalism itself, he said, “The foundation needs to be laid, and if the other parties are not serving their purpose, we can give this

party for workers a shot.”

On the Middle East he said that we should “let the people of Gaza decide what they want rather than having an outsider like Trump decide for them in the name of rebuilding the houses.” He said that ethnic cleansing was “definitely part of the plan, to move those people who are there in the name of reconstructing the place that has been bombed.”



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