

Australian election day interviews: Major parties have no answers for social crisis

Our reporters

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In Saturday's Australian federal election, the Labor and Liberal-National Coalition parties together received the lowest ever share of first preferences, with almost one-third of voters choosing a minor party or independent candidate.

The decline in support for the major parties underscores that the re-election of Labor is in no way a popular endorsement of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and his government, which has presided over the worst cuts to living standards in 70 years.

On polling day, Socialist Equality Party campaigners heard from workers and young people about their concerns over the soaring cost of living and their growing hostility to the capitalist parties, which have no answer to the worsening social crisis.

SEP candidates and members found strong support for the party's perspective, that an independent mass movement in the working class must be built to fight for socialism worldwide as the only alternative to deepening austerity and war.

Alice, a school teacher in Brisbane, voted for the SEP after reading our election statement when going into the polling booth.

She said: "I feel the major parties really haven't done anything for the working class and aren't even trying. I have been disgusted with their campaigns; there's so much inequality and problems in society that aren't being addressed.

"The LNP (Liberal-National Party) are scum frankly, but Labor as well really has no understanding of the problems working-class people are dealing with. I see this particularly working in a state school.

"I teach in a working-class area. Our students are going hungry, the number of kids that aren't getting enough to eat at home is rising. Of course, aside from that you also have decreased opportunities, like outdoor excursions, books and supplies, enough staff, etc. There's just no money for anything for students.

"It's getting to the point that I have to buy my students some of the supplies they need because otherwise they wouldn't have pens, pencils and workbooks.

"I had never met or heard about the SEP until you handed me your leaflet. But I've considered myself left-leaning my whole life. I'm for socialism.

"When I saw that you had a socialist candidate at this election, I was excited! It's important that working people have a voice, and they aren't going to get it through Labor. If you are frustrated with the major parties, and I think many people are, then voting for socialists is really the only way to go.

"I'm against war, and I agree that after this election, whoever wins, nothing will improve for workers, they'll just keep demanding more and more cuts to services.

"I also agree with what you've said about international unity. There shouldn't be any barriers between workers across the world; we've all got to fight against capitalism and not be divided and thrown into war with each other."

SEP campaigners raised that the party's position was that the wealth of the billionaires should be expropriated and used to fund things like public education. Alice replied: "I agree 100 percent, in a society with so much wealth going to the top it's an absolute disgrace that people can't get an education and even go hungry!"

"I think when working people around the world realise that the interests of the billionaires are against them, there will definitely be a revolution."

Mary, an early childhood teacher originally from Tonga, told SEP campaigners in Melbourne: "Politicians don't stand for the people, and with the cost of living, what can we do? Over the years there's been so many broken promises and we've just lost trust.

"I work in early childhood and what I've been seeing are the most vulnerable people. In my room I've got a couple of children, who we know really need help and support but their families can't afford to pay for their [disability] assessment. It costs them \$3,000 just to see if their child needs extra help, so where are all of our taxes going? It goes to fund war. It's just an outrageous thing, living in Australia and we're taxed so much on our pay and nothing changes. I believe every leader really does just work for themselves or maybe someone like the property developers.

"There are a lot of people whose voices are not being heard. What is Australia going to look like in 10 years' time? How are the young people going to fend for themselves, like to pay for inflation? My 21-year-old is still living at home and she's working and doing university, she can't afford to go and get her own place to rent. It's just outrageous."

Mary said she had voted for an independent candidate, "because they were looking at the war in Gaza. The others were just so quiet on this. It is a humanitarian catastrophe and no one is thinking of it. What is going on now, with children dying and people starving, is very upsetting and I believe it's inhumane. It's quite disturbing to live in a world like this, with our brothers and sisters dying."

Jayasiri, Champa and Tharuki spoke about the cost of living crisis confronting ordinary people. Jayasiri said, "The cost of living everyday goes up. Some items have doubled in price."

Champa added: "They always get big tax [from us]. But the thing is, after that we expect something from this tax but it doesn't happen here most of the time, like Medicare issues."

Asked where they think the money going, Jayasiri said, "Maybe for the big businesses' pockets."

Tharuki said: "I think it's getting harder and harder for young people to achieve the goals that the older generations have. We have goals of buying a house one day, but that's getting out of reach [despite] the promises that the government makes.

"We feel betrayed by the government, and that's why we feel like a bit unheard. They say they will deliver for the younger people, but I don't think that's what they actually have achieved. I don't think that's the first goal they have either. It's just more benefiting the people who are richer, people who have more power."

Aiman, a roof plumber, told Morgan Peach, the SEP candidate for

Calwell, "Prices of everything are going through the roof. You can't get a house. It's all over the shop at the moment."

On the two major parties, he said: "We don't know who to go for. They both say they'll do something, but we know they'll never do it."

Aiman was angered by the government's support for the Gaza genocide: "It's not good and no one else [apart from the SEP] is speaking about it in the election. They're just brushing it off to the side. And when you do try to stand up against it, you're labelled either this or that."

Khadija, a young mother in the Calwell electorate, said: "When it comes to voting time, what I personally believe is that everything gets swept under the rug until they want votes. Or they want to say, 'Oh, this is what we're going to do,' but then nothing really happens."

When asked about the SEP's perspective she replied: "If we collectively get together—you know, 'power to the people'—if the working class can actually get together and say 'this is what we're going to do and this is the change we're going to make,' hopefully we'll see that change coming in."

Ella, a worker originally from Yugoslavia, did not vote for any of the major parties. "They are all exactly the same when you come down to it. It's all pretty undemocratic."

"The main issues for me were the cost of living, which is a product of the global economic environment, but above all Palestine. The inaction, the turning away by the major parties before and during this election."

Nada, who previously worked in education administration, had already voted when she spoke to SEP campaigners at a polling booth in the seat of Watson in Sydney's southwest. She said she voted for one of the two independent Muslim candidates standing in the electorate.

"I don't trust Labor or Liberal at all and so I voted for one of the Muslim candidates in the hope that he would do the right thing. Everything about this system is wrong and the elections just seem to be a big-business process. To tell you the truth, I'm only voting because I'd be fined if I didn't vote."

"My biggest fear is if Dutton is elected, because he's the same as Trump who is heading towards a third world war, which seems where the whole world is heading right now."

"We've protested for years, raising our voices for the Palestinians and yet we're ignored."

"I hadn't heard of your party before, but I strongly agree with what you say about workers getting together all around the world to fight for equality and their rights. People need to be educated that there are other options and a party like yours. It's the working class which is suffering and struggling the most and we're all in the same boat. We work the hardest, and create all the wealth, but don't see the results of our labour."

Adam, who owns a removalist company, said "the main issue [in the election] is to acknowledge Palestine and stop the genocide. Also to keep Medicare, and more rights for disabled people."

"I'm not with the Labor Party at all. I disagree with how they whitewash things. I used to be a Labor Party supporter, but stopped because of their silence on the genocide."

"Maybe Labor started representing workers when it first formed, but big business has infiltrated them, either with kick-backs or corruption."

"I'm disgusted by the major parties, Labor and Liberal. Six months on, over 70,000 people dead and they're still being silent or saying Israel has a right to defend itself? It's absolutely insane."

Asked what he thought about the Greens' aim to form a de facto coalition government with Labor, he said, "I don't like that either. I agree with what the Greens think about certain things, but Labor and Liberal 100 percent can go in the bin."

He was happy to see the SEP standing socialist candidates in the election, saying, "We all know what socialism means. It means everyone is equal, helping those who need to be helped. Why should multi-billionaires get things for free when people are struggling?"

Justin, a 33-year-old warehouse worker, told SEP campaigners at the Greenacre polling booth in southwest Sydney: "I don't think the election will make any difference, for the same reason it always happens. The people with all the money make all the decisions."

"I voted for Labor because they are the 'least worst.' I've been working in warehousing for a year. Although we just got a pay rise, it is not enough to make up for rising costs of living."

"I agree with you that the killing is going to go on in Gaza. It's about the US trying to control the world. It's only going to get worse. The only way we are going to stop a nuclear war is to have an international solution, a general strike."

Adam, a former bus driver in Newcastle, spoke about the worsening conditions faced by public transport workers under privatisation. He said, "Driver safety has decreased since [Keolis Downer] has taken over from when it was State Transit."

"In the past you had to wait for a driver who'd been driving for 35 years to retire before you could get a job there. Now, they proudly stated that last year alone, 'we trained 150 new drivers.' It's because they've got such a high turnover, because they treat the drivers like sh.t."

"I had a shoulder injury from driving that required surgery and I was just bullied and harassed. They downloaded my driving video to scroll through it to try to pick me out on things I've done wrong. Intimidated me. I was told I couldn't speak to other drivers. The local [union officials] just wiped their hands of it; I had to go to the Sydney branch."

"I was on \$35 an hour. The majority of shifts at this company are broken shifts. So you could start at 8 in the morning and then finish at 8 or 9 o'clock at night, with a 4-hour break in between."

"After finishing at 8 or 9 o'clock you could start at 7 o'clock the next morning. You could get a 35-hour week, but they drive 7 days a week, the maximum you could drive for was 9 days in a row before having a day off."

Adam, who described himself as a "Marxist, probably since I was at uni," agreed with the necessity for a unified global struggle by the working class: "Once you get rid of borders, you get rid of a lot of problems, don't you? It's the ruling class that go to war, we should be working together with workers in other countries in solidarity."

George is a student in Newcastle doing a masters in social work. She is opposed to the genocide in Gaza and sees little difference between the major parties.

She said: "Trump is an insane dictator, another Nazi, saying horrible things about refugees and queer people. I think we will have a revolution soon, given the massive wealth disparity and the rich getting richer."

Adam, a removalist, said: "I have family members who are teachers, mates who are nurses and I want my vote to support them because they're struggling at the moment. Myself, I've struggled with getting work and rental places. There's not a lot of opportunities for young Australians these days, it's hard to find a decent job and a house to live in."

On the lack of public housing, he said, "I know exactly what you mean. My partner is currently waiting for a home for her and her four children, up in Grafton. The wait times are ridiculous."

"With Labor and Liberal, I think it's about time Australia looks around and finds someone new to be honest, a new party that can make people's lives better. I think it's good that [the SEP] is international. We get a lot of our products from China, Taiwan and other parts of the world. We've got a whole lot of exports we send to the world, so we're connected in that way. It's a long road ahead [to unite the working class internationally], but I think it's a good concept for sure."



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