

# Protesters speak out against Australian state Labor government's planned public housing demolition

Our reporters  
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On Saturday, more than 500 protesters attended a demonstration against the Victorian state Labor government's planned demolition of 44 public housing towers in the state capital Melbourne. The demolitions will displace at least 10,000 workers and their families, including those from the most vulnerable sections of society like immigrants and people living with disabilities.

Socialist Equality Party (SEP) members campaigned at the protest, which expressed broad and growing opposition among residents, workers and youth to the demolition, as well as the wider assault against the basic social rights and living standards of the working class.

SEP campaigners explained the necessity of taking up a struggle against Labor and all the parties and organisations—including the Greens, unions and pseudo-left—which put forward the illusion that public housing can be defended by appeals to the Labor government. The SEP called on protesters to join its fight to build the Neighbourhood Action Committee—an independent organisation of residents, workers and others—to halt the demolition and defend public housing.

Read the *World Socialist Web Site*'s coverage of the rally [here](#).

Below are interviews obtained by the SEP with protesters at Saturday's demonstration.

**Candice** lives in so-called "social housing," which is a pro-business scheme initiated by the government to replace public housing.

"I was transferred from government housing in 2022 to social housing because of domestic violence. I feel that if the people in the towers don't want to leave public housing, then they have the right to stay there."

It's one of the ways that governments privatise things without saying what they're doing. I didn't realise when I got transferred to social housing that it was different to public housing. I could have been handing away my rights. I get a lot of anxiety after I found this out.

"I'm still worried. Will I be able to stay there? It's out of my control because it's not government-owned anymore. Am I here for life? I got told that as long as I pay my rent and do the right thing I will have tenancy there. But there is a potential for me to be on the street.

"The people they are kicking out are the most marginalised people in the towers. There are so many barriers for them, and they don't know their rights. They are privatising places where refugees and the most traumatised in society live.

"The government is doing this, because it's prime real estate. But homelessness is getting worse," Candice added. "You have a situation where the cost of living is going up. Rent is increasing. Everything is going up in price. I don't want Australia to go the way of America where everything is privatised. What is next? Medicare?"

**Thi** has been a resident of the public housing tower in the inner-east suburb Richmond for 11 years.

Thi attended the court hearings on the class action brought by residents against the government's planned demolitions. The Supreme Court dismissed the case in April.

"After that, a lot of people were very shocked. A lot of people were crying. Our life is very good and very enjoyable. There is no problem. When we heard what Homes Victoria are doing, our lives changed. We can't sleep. No energy for working."

Thi said the cost of living is skyrocketing. “Everything has gone up. Food is up, telephone up, electricity up. We have no money. Public housing saved my life. That’s why we say keep this public housing for this life and for the future and my kid’s future.”

Unemployed worker **Harold** is not a public housing resident himself, but is part of a group of supporters of public housing.

“I think the Labor Party has shown its true colours with the demolition of the towers,” Harold said. “They are a conservative party just like the Liberals. Many of the left parties promote illusions in Labor that they are supposed to be a bit better than the Liberals. Labor’s decision to carry out the demolition shows they are not different,” he added.

“The Liberals would have done it openly, but the Labor Party calls it housing renewal, or whatever they call it now. But it amounts to the same thing, privatisation, and that shows you what Labor is.”

“Pressuring Labor to change its mind, or for them to pay any attention, is a waste of time,” Harold said. “It is just another example of Labor ruling for the ruling class. They take their orders from the bosses. I was just handed a leaflet [by a pseudo-left group] to protest outside the ALP conference, another waste of time.”

Referring to the SEP, Harold said: “You guys talk about turning to the working class. I agree because workers have the power.”

**John**, a landscaper in his 20s, said: “I think a lot of people have been struggling for a while now, not just economically but with family issues as well. Public housing means a lot to me. I don’t even have it that bad compared to some of my mates.”

The young worker detailed the impact of the housing crisis on him and his generation.

“I don’t need it as much as some other people, but it’s tough,” John added. “I’m still just couch surfing most of the time. I’m kind of living out of the work van at the moment. I keep all my stuff in a work van and then I sometimes stay with relatives or with mates.”

“I keep going to [rental] inspections, but it never pans out because people make better offers than I can. I’ve heard people pay all 12 months [rent] up front just trying to get a spot.”

**Brenda** had stayed at the Ozanam House homeless shelter in the inner suburb of North Melbourne, run by

the not-for-profit organisation Vincent Care.

“Yeah, it’s full, then they empty it and then they fill it up with the same people because they don’t know how to advocate for themselves. They don’t know their rights, they don’t know what they’re entitled to and what they aren’t entitled to,” Brenda told the SEP.

“The community housing landlord is trying to breach us. If you’ve done something against your lease, then they can kick you out. We didn’t have a key fob, so we slid our hand through the gap in the door and pressed the button to get in and they breached us.”

“My mum grew up in the towers like in Collingwood. Without them there’s nowhere. I just think it’s heartless to demolish the towers.”

**Sapphire** is doing a major in climate and social justice at Swinburne University.

“I just think that it’s so important to preserve public housing. It’s very much putting many people at risk of being unhoused and it’s just disgraceful that the government is not making it a priority and it’s wanting to demolish it,” she said.

“It’s putting so many people’s well-being at risk and it affects so many of us. It affects me. I grew up in the child protection system. So, I’m at risk of homelessness and it’s honestly horrific that the government doesn’t seem to give a damn.”

“I believe [the demolitions are being done] out of a motive of just being greedy,” Sapphire added. “Maybe they want to redirect that funding to spending more and investing more in the military and sending more weapons to Israel, to be honest, I wouldn’t be surprised.”

“It shows where the government’s priorities lie and they’re really just not with the people, they’re with the elite and the people who can give them more profits, which is disgusting. So we need to come together and fight against it.”

To join the fight against the demolition of the Melbourne towers and for the defence of public housing more broadly, sign up as a member of the Neighbourhood Action Committee.



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