“Everything is more expensive and life is so hard”: Workers speak out during Victorian election campaign

Our reporters
9 November 2026

Socialist Equality Party (SEP) candidates Morgan Peach and Peter Byrne have been campaigning across Melbourne’s northern suburbs ahead of the November 28 Victorian state election. The working-class areas of the Northern Metropolitan Region, where they are standing, have been particularly hard hit by soaring housing costs, declining real wages and the deterioration of essential public services.

In discussions with workers and young people, SEP campaigners have explained that the cost-of-living crisis is inseparable from the broader assault on working-class living standards, including the diversion of vast public resources into war and militarism. They have raised the need for an independent movement of the working class against austerity and war, in opposition to the Labor government and all the capitalist parties.

Eddy, a delivery driver who emigrated to Australia 45 years ago, spoke to SEP campaigners in the working-class suburb of Dallas.

“I do deliveries and I am busting my back. I can’t stop working and I am in my 60s. Who will pay the mortgage?”

“The political parties are all the same, just different faces,” he said. “How long has Labor been in office? It’s been 12 years and everything is more expensive and life in general is so hard. There are a handful of billionaires but look how many people are homeless.”

Eddy pointed to the destruction of manufacturing as a major factor in the social crisis. Nearby Broadmeadows was a major centre of car manufacturing in Melbourne until Ford ended production there in 2016. The destruction of the car industry, with the loss of tens of thousands of jobs, was overseen by successive Labor and Liberal governments, with the collaboration of the trade union bureaucracy.

Eddy rejected attempts to blame immigrants for the deteriorating conditions.

“The big political parties should stop blaming people who have immigrated, which is something they all do. One Nation try to win votes from Liberal and Labor. They scapegoat people all the time.”

He also linked the rising cost of living to the diversion of public resources into militarism.

“I am against war. The US lives on blood, bombing one country and dictating to another. Who pays for all this?”

Zane, a network electrical engineer originally from Pakistan, met SEP campaigners at Roxy Central shopping centre in Roxburgh Park.

“It’s very hard. The prices have gone up so much since I got married,” he said. “Bills of $600 are now $1,200 and I don’t think we’re overspending. I had to sell my house. The mortgage was around $4,000 per month. I’m now living in a rental. It’s a bigger house, but the rent is $2,500 per month.

“If you go 10 kilometres towards the city, I bet 99 percent of Melbourne people won’t be able to buy a house.”

Asked about the escalating danger of world war, Zane pointed to the devastating consequences of US military interventions in the Middle East and Central Asia.

“Since I was born, I have seen this: like Iraq, Syria. I’m from Pakistan and we live next to Afghanistan. When this whole thing started after 9/11, I was a kid. … We have lost so many lives.”

Zane warned that world wars could develop over years before people fully recognised what was taking

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place.

A **healthcare worker** at a major hospital in the electorate spoke about the mounting pressures on the public health system.

The hospital was "too full," the worker said. "A lot of good people do fantastic work. It's got a bad reputation. It's the system. The government has caused it to have a bad reputation in the past because they're under pressure."

The worker said hospital facilities were inadequate for the growing population, particularly maternity services, which could be "triple the size" of their current capacity.

Asked about the cost of living, the worker said: "Everything's just gone up. I can do up to about 16 hours overtime a week. We're actually all lining up to do it because we've all got mortgages and bills."

Usman, an IT worker, spoke about the growing insecurity of employment, worsening working conditions and the concentration of wealth.

"I am in the IT field, and I've realised that a lot of jobs, since COVID, are being moved abroad," he said. "There are a lot of redundancies happening, across different companies. Where I was made redundant, the new person they hired is made to work 12 hours, 13 hours, 14 hours every day.

"I think that's pure capitalism. It's the same for many countries. I don't see things getting better. Every day, things are getting worse and worse. The people who are making money, they are making billions of dollars, record amounts. The wealth is there."

Usman also expressed concern about the impact of war on living costs.

"The cost of living is terrible. The war has caused petrol prices, diesel prices to rise, and everything is becoming more expensive. My first concern is, when is it going to stop?"

Usman expressed deep distrust of the established political parties.

"I don't like any other parties, I think they are part of the elite. There are two main parties, and the elites keep putting them in, and when they see that the population is getting weary of them, they raise another party, so people get the illusion that their choices matter.

"If the third party gets in power, it will be doing the same thing under a different name. This is true for the Greens Party, and of course One Nation as well."

Usman concluded: "I don't align with any of those other parties. I like that the SEP shows you what they believe and shows you the truth. … I haven't voted before because I haven't liked any party. This is the first party that I would vote for.

"I think the only way change will come is through revolution."

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