

SEP stands candidates to provide socialist alternative

Prime Minister Gillard calls snap Australian election

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Newly-installed Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard last Saturday called an Australian federal election for August 21, giving the shortest time legally possible for the campaign.

A key factor in the snap poll was the decision by Gillard and Labor Party bosses to attempt to shut down all public discussion of the June 24 coup that removed Kevin Rudd as prime minister and the agenda behind it.

Fresh revelations about how she ousted Rudd surfaced at her National Press Club address last Thursday, propelling her to call the election two days later.

On Saturday, in a column headlined, “Coups leak kills off poll options,” Dennis Shanahan, political editor of the *Australian*, commented: “Gillard’s alternative was to eke out the next few weeks and try to establish herself as a new leader and fresh start, but the cloud of Rudd disclosures and destabilisation appear to have put an end to that.”

Recent days have also seen repeated newspaper editorials urging Gillard to call an early election to suppress the stench of Rudd’s ousting and return a new government before the economic situation deteriorates. Fears are mounting within ruling circles over continuing mass unemployment in the US, the worsening sovereign and bank debt crisis in Europe and signs of slowing growth in the over-heated Chinese economy.

Rudd’s sacking, carried out by Labor’s factional leaders at the behest of the giant mining companies and the financial markets, has sent a tremor through the Australian electorate. A poll published at the weekend indicated that some 57 percent of voters believed the manner of the former prime minister’s removal would

harm Labor’s chances of re-election.

The June 23-24 coup tore open the facade of parliamentary democracy to reveal, at least partially, the corporate and financial forces that operate behind it. Labor Party leaders are now seeking to close it again as soon as possible.

But the election itself will be no more “democratic” than the removal of Rudd. Regardless of which party—Labor or the Liberal-National Party coalition—forms the next government its program has already been determined: support for the indefinite US-led war in Afghanistan, deep cuts in social spending, and a new wave of pro-market “restructuring” carried out at the direct expense of the jobs, wages and living standards of workers and young people.

At her press conference to announce the election, Gillard used the phrase “moving forward” 39 times in 31 minutes. One newspaper editorial aptly described her performance as “zombie-like”.

Likewise, Liberal Party leader Tony Abbott repeatedly promised “real action”. Both parties are determined to remain “on message” over the next five weeks to prevent any critical examination of their policies under conditions of the worst global economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The emptiness of Gillard’s phrase-mongering was made clear in the calling of the election itself. While claiming that she wished to give the Australian people their “birthright” to vote, new voters have only 11 hours, from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. today, to enrol. An estimated 1.4 million eligible voters—one in ten, and mostly young—are not on the electoral rolls.

Since Gillard was appointed, she has moved relentlessly to the right on every front. As well as

scuttling the proposed super profits mining tax, at a cost of at least \$7.5 billion, she has pledged to keep Australian troops in Afghanistan indefinitely and has sought to outdo the opposition Liberal-National Coalition in demonising refugees.

Recent days have seen an unprecedented convergence between Labor and the Liberals. According to the *Australian*, there is now “scarcely a centimetre between the parties on many issues”. On Saturday, Liberal leader Tony Abbott pledged to leave Labor’s “Fair Work” industrial relations laws unchanged for three years if the Coalition took office. Labor’s legislation retains all the anti-strike provisions of the previous Howard Liberal government’s “WorkChoices” regime.

For her part, Gillard has adopted the former Howard government’s policy of removing refugees to a detention camp in a nearby impoverished country—she prefers East Timor to Howard’s Nauru and Manus Island—and has declared that there are “some emerging points of agreement” between her and Abbott, particularly on asylum-seekers. Both leaders are cynically using the arrival of several boatloads of refugees in Australian waters as a xenophobic diversion from the mounting economic and social problems caused by the policies of both major parties.

Yesterday, on the first official day of the election campaign, Gillard went further, promising to curb migration and blaming over-population for the congested roads, poor public transport, soaring housing and utility costs, and deteriorating social services in major cities. Her “sustainable population” pitch is a bid to distract attention from the impact of decades of under-funding and privatisation carried out by Labor and Liberal governments alike. She also stirred, none too subtly, “White Australia” sentiment by describing the country as a “sanctuary” from global overcrowding.

In a guarantee to the financial markets, Gillard and Abbott have both committed themselves to produce a budget surplus by 2013. This will mean slashing social spending to pay off the massive debt left by the stimulus packages that were used to prop up the banks and sections of big business during the 2008-09 worldwide meltdown. In her address to the National Press Club last Thursday, Gillard warned of “hard choices” and “unpopular cuts”.

The Greens, the third party of the political

establishment, have rushed to indicate their readiness to form an informal coalition with either Labor or Liberal in the interests of “stability”—that is, of shoring up the existing order against increasing popular disaffection. On Saturday, leader Bob Brown said he had spoken to both Gillard and Abbott and was ready to work with either.

The Greens have reportedly just sealed a preference vote-swapping deal with Labor, intended to give Gillard the second preference votes she needs to hold onto office and deliver the Greens the balance of power in the Senate, the upper house. The result would be a de facto Labor-Greens coalition, like the one already in place in the state of Tasmania, committed to imposing the demands of financial markets for savage attacks on the social position of the working class.

The Socialist Equality Party is standing candidates in the election to provide the only genuine alternative for working people. The SEP candidates, announced today, will advance a socialist program, based on the international unity of the working class against capitalist austerity and war, and the fight for a workers’ government to completely reorganise society in the interests of the majority, not the wealthy elite (see: “Australia: Socialist Equality Party announces its 2010 election candidates”).

Against the Greens, and the pseudo “left” groups such as Socialist Alliance, which are promoting the return of a Labor government as a “lesser evil” to the Liberals, the SEP campaign will fight for the building of the SEP as the new mass party of the working class, based on the international and historical foundations of the Marxist movement. The SEP’s election manifesto will shortly be published on the WSWS.



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