

Australian Labor government prepares for election campaign of lies

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The minority Australian Labor Party (ALP) government of Prime Minister Julia Gillard has revealed over the past several weeks how it intends to cling to power. As the countdown begins for the next election—which has to take place by November 2013, but can be called earlier—Labor has launched a cynical campaign to portray itself as the “lesser evil” and even “progressive” choice between the country’s two major capitalist parties.

The campaign was initiated in the wake of budget measures announced earlier this month by the state Liberal National Party government in Queensland and the Liberal/National Party coalition governments in New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria. The conservative-led states, facing falling revenue, and under immense pressure from both financial markets and the Gillard government to wind back their debt levels, have unveiled major cutbacks to public education and health, and public sector jobs.

No less draconian attacks on public services are already underway in the Labor-led states of South Australia and Tasmania. The federal Labor government has nevertheless sought to gain political mileage from the cutbacks in Queensland and NSW, denouncing them as the outcome of conservative party ideology. Federal opposition leader Tony Abbott has been accused of plotting even more savage cuts at the national level if the Liberal and National parties win government, while Labor’s re-election is being portrayed as the only way to prevent a right-wing rampage against the working class.

Gillard spelt out the basic theme of Labor’s bid to hold on to power in a September 17 speech to a conference of the Queensland state branch of the ALP.

“The Liberals and Nationals always cut too much and they always cut the wrong things. They devastate families, damage businesses, hurt communities,” Gillard declared. “In 2013 Australians will have a choice. A clear choice between two visions of our nation’s future. Do

you want a high-wage, high-skill, high-value-add society where everyone gets a chance? Or a race to the bottom, cutting wages, cutting conditions, everyone going backwards, the weakest scrambling for two dollars a day. Do you want a budget surplus, job creation, a strong economy? Or a downward spiral of cuts, job losses and decline. Do you want progressive government informed by reason with a plan for the future? Or a regime of aggression and negativity with a secret plan for cuts? ... Delegates, carry this message to the nation in 2013.”

Gillard’s attempt to draw a contrast between the programs of Labor and the conservative parties is a fraud. It hinges on a shameless falsification of the record, not only of her administration, but those of her ALP predecessors.

Some three decades ago, social democratic and Labor parties internationally, along with the trade unions, renounced their national reformist programs in response to the ever more globally integrated character of production that began to transform the world economy from the late 1970s. To protect the “international competitiveness” of Australian capitalism, the Hawke and Keating Labor governments, which held office from 1983 to 1996, deregulated the financial markets, slashed national tariffs and subsidies and, through the Accords with the trade unions, imposed a far-reaching assault on wages and working conditions. Hundreds of thousands of jobs were destroyed in so-called uncompetitive industries and entire sections of the workforce reduced to part-time, casual or contract labor. Overall, Labor presided over the greatest decline in the working class’s share of national income and wealth since the 1930s, while corporate profits and the incomes of the richest 1 percent soared.

Labor’s transformation into an openly big business party led ultimately to a historic collapse of its social base in the working class. In 1996 the Labor government was thrown out of office in one of the biggest ever anti-Labor

swings. It only regained power in 2007 due to mass hostility toward the conservative government of John Howard over its participation in the illegal US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, its brutal treatment of refugees and the continuous widening of social inequality. Labor's program, however, was not a return to social reform, but a deepening of the free market agenda that had been pursued during the Hawke-Keating years.

The basic truth of Australian politics is that there is not an iota of difference between Labor and the conservative parties on any fundamental issue. The Gillard government provides unconditional support for US militarism around the world, and is presiding over the persecution of refugees, the ongoing erosion of basic democratic rights and the dismantling of what remains of social security, old-age pensions and public education.

Gillard's "vision" of intensified class war under an Abbott-led government is exactly what Labor is preparing. It has pledged to the financial markets that it will turn the federal budget deficit of \$44.4 billion into a surplus by the end of the financial year, on June 30, 2013. It began the massive turn-around with its May budget, announcing the biggest cut in government spending in 25 years, at least 3,000 federal public service job cuts, a 2.5 percent cap on public servant wage rises and further cuts in social security entitlements. Greater cuts were only put off because Treasurer Wayne Swan relied on absurd forecasts of global and domestic economic growth to project taxation revenue increases, particularly from the mining industry.

The real situation is that Labor's termination of its budget stimulus, which was initiated to shore up business in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial meltdown, has compounded the stagnant state of most sectors of the Australian economy. Over the past three months, falling global demand has led to sharp decreases in prices for iron ore and coal—the country's two largest exports. Mining companies are throwing their Australian investment strategies into reverse, closing down mines or scaling back production, mothballing new projects, slashing jobs and demanding wage cuts and greater productivity from their workforces.

Analysts for the *Age* newspaper have estimated that if the commodity price slump continues, the flow-on effect will be 50,000 job losses and \$7 billion lost tax revenue in 2012-2013, with a further 100,000 job losses and \$14 billion lost tax revenue in 2013-2014. Standard & Poor's has predicted that the Gillard government's budget is currently on track for a \$20 to \$25 billion deficit,

requiring austerity measures rivalling those being inflicted in Europe and the United States to produce the promised surplus.

Labor's launch of the fraudulent "lesser evil" campaign may well be a signal that Gillard is preparing to call an early election and attempt to regain office on the back of an "anti-conservative", anti-Tony Abbott scare campaign—before unveiling sweeping cutbacks herself.

Once again, the trade union apparatus, the self-styled "progressive" media, the Greens and the pseudo-left outfits have rushed to jump on board, continuing their promotion of the "lesser evil" fraud. While they denounce Abbott and the conservatives at every opportunity, they seek to promote Gillard, politely moderating any criticisms of Labor, while launching savage attacks on anyone who fights for an alternative socialist program. Their positions articulate the hostility of a privileged section of the middle class toward the development of an independent movement of the working class that would challenge not only Labor, but the entire political establishment and the capitalist interests it serves.

The Socialist Equality Party meetings over the coming weeks, "The socialist answer to Labor's program of war and austerity", will discuss the essential conclusions that must be drawn by the working class from its bitter historical experiences with the ALP: the need to make a decisive political break with Labor and its nationalist program and take up a conscious struggle for the socialist and internationalist perspective of the SEP. We urge workers, students and young people to make plans to attend the meeting in your area. [Click here for full details.](#)



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