

Kevin Rudd reinstalled as Australian prime minister

Patrick O'Connor
27 June 2013

Kevin Rudd has been today installed as Australian prime minister, three years after he was removed in an inner-party coup, following one of the most serious political crises in the 122-year history of the Labor Party.

Following last night's 57 to 45 vote by the Labor caucus to restore Rudd to the Labor leadership, the entire ruling establishment has closed ranks behind the decision.

Governor General Quentin Bryce hurriedly swore Rudd in this morning. She and her legal advisers brushed aside concerns raised about the constitutional legitimacy of appointing Rudd as head of the minority government before he had demonstrated his ability to secure a majority on the floor of parliament.

Two rural independent parliamentarians, Rob Oakeshott and Tony Windsor, who had supported Gillard during the past three years, had earlier cast doubt on whether they would endorse Rudd. However, there was no desire within ruling circles to add a constitutional crisis to the deep political turmoil, so Rudd has been provided safe passage back into office.

Late last night, Opposition leader Tony Abbott effectively ruled out moving a no confidence motion against the new prime minister, declaring he was not interested in "parliamentary games".

The overriding motivation behind the decision to back the reinstatement of Rudd was the fear within ruling circles that the unpopularity of Gillard has been so deep and widespread, because of her role in the coup against Rudd three years ago, that the Labor Party was heading towards an electoral wipeout in the forthcoming federal election, scheduled for September 14. Recent polls have indicated that, under Gillard's leadership, the Labor Party might have received fewer than 30 seats in the 150-seat House of Representatives.

If Rudd appears to provide the means for supplying Labor with an electoral boost, it is only because he has continued to enjoy a degree of public sympathy—falsely elevated by the media into celebrity-style "popularity"—for being the victim of the anti-democratic political knifing at the hands of Gillard and her factional backers in the Labor Party.

The last minute efforts to resuscitate the electoral fortunes of the Labor Party, virtually on the eve of the scheduled election, reflect deep concerns in ruling circles that its collapse would endanger the stability of parliamentary rule itself.

Earlier this month, as the leadership speculation was growing, Barry Cohen, a minister in the previous Labor government of Bob Hawke, warned that a change was necessary to prevent an electoral disaster. "If it's as bad as some predict there won't be an ALP, or at least not as presently constituted," he said.

Given the role it has played over more than a century in subordinating the working class to the dictates of the capitalist state, above all in conditions of economic and political crisis, the threatened disintegration of the Labor Party has far-reaching implications going well beyond the parliamentary arena.

The collapse of the minerals boom and the sweeping jobs cuts now taking place across the economy, combined with the austerity program already initiated by Gillard, mean that the conditions that have led to explosive social struggles in Europe, Turkey and now Brazil have announced their arrival in Australia.

Reflecting the nervousness in ruling circles over these events and the alienation of an entire generation of young people from the parliamentary system, Rudd made a direct appeal to the youth in his first remarks after being elected.

"It is clear that many of you, in fact too many of you,

have looked at our political system and the parliament in recent years and not liked or respected much of what you have seen ... I understand why you have switched off. It's hardly a surprise but I want to ask you to please come back and listen afresh. It's really important that we get you engaged, in any way we can."

In the 2007 election, Rudd won significant support among young people who were hostile to the previous Howard government's policies, including on the Iraq war, climate change, democratic rights, and refugees. This support quickly evaporated, however, and Rudd's pitch in 2013 is even more threadbare than it was six years ago.

Rudd's call for "engagement" takes place as he made clear that new inroads have to be made into the social position of workers and youth. Pointing to the worsening situation confronting Australian capitalism, he warned: "There are a lot of bad things happening out there. The global economy is still experiencing the slowest of recoveries. The China resources boom is over."

This is the second ousting of a Labor prime minister through sordid backroom plots and manoeuvres in just three years, and there is no doubt that the same political forces were at play in both anti-democratic events.

A key factor in Rudd's removal was the opposition within the Obama administration to Rudd's attempts to ensure that the US would accommodate China's growing influence in the Asia-Pacific region.

This policy cut across Obama's aggressive intervention throughout Asia to contain China and Rudd's ousting was organised by a cabal of Labor and union leaders described by the US embassy as "protected sources". Following Rudd's removal, Obama made a twice delayed visit to Australia and announced the pivot to Asia policy, including the stationing of US marine forces in Darwin, in his address to the Australian parliament in November 2011.

The key factor in Gillard's demise yesterday was the decision by Bill Shorten, one of the key coup plotters of 2010 and the leader of her so-called "Praetorian guard", to switch sides. Shorten was described in an American diplomatic cable, published by WikiLeaks, as a "young, ambitious parliamentarian ... widely known for his pro-US stance".

Shorten would have certainly consulted with his American contacts before making his about-turn.

The *Australian* today reported a US State Department official welcoming Rudd's return as prime minister: "We are confident we will continue the closest relationship possible with any future Australian government," he said.

Washington has no objection to working with Rudd as a short-term caretaker prime minister ahead of the election. And if he wins another term, he will be confronted with very different "facts on the ground" from the last time he held office.

Rudd was at pains to mend fences on another front as he sought support from big business, speaking about "tough decisions ahead on the future of our economy" and the need to "look at growing the size of our economic pie as well as how it is distributed".

He added: "Let me say this to Australian business: I want to work closely with you. I've worked with you closely in the past ... What I want to see here in Canberra is for business and Labor to work together. I don't want to see things that drive business and Labor apart. We've been natural partners in the past and we can be again in the future."

His remarks won qualified support from the financial and Murdoch press. Markets were up on the news of Gillard's removal, and business groups pressed for an election date to end the minority government and install one they hope will have an outright majority that will more effectively implement the stepped-up attacks on the working class they have been demanding.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact