

# A socialist program against war, austerity and the drive to dictatorship

**The Socialist Equality Party**  
**5 July 2013**

*The Socialist Equality Party has issued the following revised election statement to clarify the political significance for the working class of the sudden ousting of Julia Gillard on June 26 and the reinstatement of Kevin Rudd as prime minister, and the necessity for workers and youth to support the SEP's 2013 election campaign.*

The Socialist Equality Party, the Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), is fielding a team of Senate candidates in five states in the upcoming federal election.

The SEP's election intervention is part of a coordinated campaign by the ICFI and its sections throughout the world aimed at uniting the working class in Australia and internationally in the struggle against the growing danger of war, the destruction of democratic rights, and the imposition of savage austerity measures.

The deepening global economic crisis and sharpening geo-strategic rivalries have been expressed in Australia in the extraordinary political turmoil surrounding the sudden ousting of Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard. In a reversal of political fortunes unparalleled in Australia or any other country, Kevin Rudd has been returned to office just as abruptly and anti-democratically as he was ousted three years ago.

The political coup of June 2010 was not carried out because of Rudd's "management style" or his opinion poll ratings. It was engineered by a handful of factional heavyweights, and pro-US "assets" within the Labor Party and trade unions, behind the backs of the Australian people, as a means of orchestrating far-reaching shifts in both foreign and domestic policy. The financial and corporate elite was demanding the junking of the post-financial crisis stimulus spending measures associated with Rudd, and the implementation of austerity measures aimed at slashing the living standards of the working class. At the same time, while Rudd remained completely committed to Australia's alliance with the US, the Obama administration was determined to put an end to his diplomatic initiatives aimed at pressuring Washington to cede some of its strategic influence in the Asia-Pacific to China.

Gillard, with full support from the Liberals, Nationals and Greens, unconditionally aligned Canberra with Obama's strategic "pivot" to Asia and with the US preparations for war against China. She agreed to a new US Marine base in the Northern Territory and other basing arrangements, which would enable the US to blockade those vital sea lanes on which China depends for energy and raw materials from the Middle East and Africa. Gillard's military and intelligence commitments undoubtedly included numerous provisions that have been kept totally secret from the Australian people.

By the beginning of 2013, the Gillard government was heading for a devastating electoral defeat that was threatening the collapse of the Labor Party. Gillard herself had become the most reviled Labor leader in history, despised by millions of ordinary working people for her role in the anti-democratic knifing of an elected prime minister—a reaction the coup-plotters had utterly failed to anticipate. She had also become the focus of three decades of bitterness and anger at Labor's pro-capitalist and anti-

working class policies, beginning with the Hawke and Keating Labor governments from 1983 to 1996.

Under conditions of a sharp turn towards recession, the ruling establishment was faced with the demise of the Labor Party—the instrument on which it has relied for more than a century to maintain the two-party system, suppress the class struggle and subordinate the working class to the capitalist state. It decided to gamble on a return to Rudd as the only Labor politician with any semblance of popular support—due solely to his status as the martyr of the 2010 coup—and thus capable of preventing the reduction of the Labor Party into a parliamentary rump and the disintegration of the two-party system itself. For all the bitter divisions and recriminations, Rudd is just as committed as both Gillard and opposition Coalition leader Tony Abbott to the extreme right-wing program being demanded by the major corporations and banks.

The Socialist Equality Party's election campaign is aimed at providing a vehicle for the working class to intervene into the political crisis in defence of its own independent class interests.

## **The US drive to war**

At the heart of our campaign is the fight to develop a broad, international anti-war movement among workers and young people on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program. In the midst of the most serious economic breakdown of world capitalism since the 1930s depression, the seeds of World War III have not only been sown, they have already begun sprouting.

Over the past two decades, US imperialism has launched a continuous series of aggressive wars—in the Balkans, Afghanistan, the Middle East and Africa—in order to try to offset its historic economic decline. It is now concentrating its military might in the Asia-Pacific region, based on the assessment that China's growing economic power is a threat that must be contained. The inexorable logic of Washington's agenda is a war that would rapidly assume nuclear dimensions and threaten the very future of civilisation. Twice in the course of the twentieth century, the capitalist ruling classes plunged mankind into world war, with devastating consequences. They must not be allowed to do so again!

Rudd's return as prime minister in no way mitigates the danger of war confronting the working class in Australia and the region. On the contrary, the conflicts that drove the 2010 coup have only intensified during the past three years. Obama's pivot has now become a reality. The network of US military and diplomatic alliances in the region is a noose being steadily tightened around the Chinese mainland. The situation in Asia, where regional conflicts intersect with the interests of great powers, increasingly resembles the pre-1914 Balkans, which provided the spark for the eruption of World War I. As Rudd told US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in a behind-closed-doors discussion in 2009, he remains a "brutal realist" on China and would favour a US pre-emptive military attack in the event that "everything goes wrong."

The drive to war is not determined by the subjective intentions of politicians, but by the sharpening contradictions of global

capitalism—above all, that between world economy and the competing interests of rival nation states. While China is not an imperialist power seeking global dominance—it occupies a subordinate position within the geo-political framework established by the major imperialist powers—its emergence as the main cheap labour platform for world capitalism has placed it in conflict with Washington’s determination to dominate key resources, raw materials and markets, in Africa and wherever else they are located.

There is deep opposition to war and militarism in the working class and among broad layers of the population, especially the youth, but it can find no outlet within the official parliamentary framework. The SEP’s election campaign will provide a powerful voice for this opposition, and the means for its conscious political expression.

The SEP bases itself on all the lessons of the strategic experiences of the international workers’ movement during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We specifically draw attention to those of the past ten years. The inability of the anti-war demonstrations that erupted in 2003 to stop the invasion of Iraq demonstrates that the pressure of public opinion, in and of itself, is powerless to halt the imperialist juggernaut. The movement failed not because it lacked support, but because its leaderships subordinated it to the existing political framework, insisting that the United Nations, or pressuring one or another wing of the political establishment, would compel the US to change course.

Since then, the political forces that dominated the anti-war movement have shifted even further to the right. They have now directly aligned themselves with US militarism. This shift is marked, above all, by the various pseudo-left tendencies which, having supported the criminal US-NATO intervention in Libya in 2011, have now lined up behind the US-led operation to carry out “regime change” in Syria.

The position of the pseudo-left was summed up in the insistence of the misnamed Socialist Alternative that it has become necessary to dispense with “knee jerk anti-imperialism.” These anti-war protestors of yesterday have transformed into ardent advocates for imperialism today. Their support for the US and other imperialist powers in the Middle East, and their silence on US war preparations in the Asia-Pacific, signify that they are already aligning themselves to back an attack on China.

The evolution of these tendencies is rooted in deep-going social and economic processes. They speak not for the working class but for affluent layers of the upper middle class, whose material interests are bound up with the rampant financial parasitism that has been the source of the vast wealth accumulated in the upper echelons of society over the past two decades, and with the drive by imperialism to control vital sources of raw materials and cheap labour, on which that wealth ultimately depends.

The crucial lesson of the past century is that the struggle against imperialist war can only advance to the extent that it mobilises the working class, on the basis of a revolutionary socialist perspective, to take political power and overthrow the capitalist profit system, the source of war.

The development of a genuine anti-war movement requires the unification of the struggles of the working class across national borders. That is why the SEP places at the very centre of its campaign the struggle against all forms of nationalism, chauvinism and racism. Rudd and his ministers have taken up where Gillard left off in stoking up anti-refugee hysteria, scapegoating asylum seekers as “economic migrants” in order to block their claims and deport them back to persecution, poverty and likely death. The SEP unconditionally defends the democratic right of every person to live and work in Australia, or any other country of their choice, with full citizenship rights.

On the eve of the outbreak of World War II, Leon Trotsky wrote: “Before exhausting or drowning mankind in blood, capitalism befools the world atmosphere with the poisonous vapours of national and race hatred.” His warning has lost none of its relevance. The clarion call of the

socialist movement, “Workers of the World, Unite!”, is the only basis on which the fight against war can be successfully mounted. Imperialism is a mighty and terrible force that threatens a global catastrophe. It can only be defeated by an even greater force: the united revolutionary movement of the international working class.

### **A social counter-revolution**

Imperialist war abroad is inevitably accompanied by class war against the working class at home. Since the global financial crisis of 2008, the savage austerity measures introduced in country after country amount to a social counter-revolution against all the social gains won by the working class in the aftermath of World War II. In Greece, Cyprus, Spain, Portugal, Italy and other European countries the working class is being driven back to the conditions of the 1930s. In Britain, what little remains of the post-war social welfare state is being systematically dismantled, while American workers confront the worst social and economic conditions since the Great Depression. Having handed out trillions of dollars to the parasites of finance capital, the ruling elites have only one policy: to make the working class pay for the historic crisis of the capitalist profit system.

Rudd has been returned to office in anticipation of explosive social upheavals in Australia. In his first speech after being reinstated, he placed special emphasis on the need to win back young people disgusted with official politics. He is well aware that beneath the surface appearance of social stability, class tensions are rapidly reaching breaking point. As in Egypt and Tunisia in 2011, and in Turkey, Brazil and again Egypt this year, mass unrest will erupt suddenly and in unanticipated forms. Rudd has been installed in a desperate attempt to channel mounting social unrest back within the parliamentary framework.

The prime minister has already declared that “tough decisions” will have to be made now that the China-driven mining boom, which provided a certain buffer for Australian capitalism, is over. Already several Australian states are in official recession and mass layoffs are accelerating across the economy. Société Générale SA analyst Albert Edwards warned in late June that the entire Australian economy was similar to the “toxic assets” that triggered the financial crash in 2008—“a leveraged time bomb waiting to blow.”

The new prime minister has pledged to work closely with big business in implementing its demands for economic “reform” and “restructuring.” After Gillard was brought to office in 2010, she junked the post-financial crisis stimulus spending measures, and launched a series of attacks on single parents, the unemployed and other welfare recipients. Now the corporate elite is demanding much more—nothing less than a European-style social counter-revolution, with permanent, sweeping spending cuts to public education, healthcare, welfare, other basic services and social infrastructure.

Big business is insistently calling for “greater productivity”—intensifying the exploitation of the working class—to ensure Australian capitalism remains “internationally competitive.” More than 130,000 manufacturing jobs have already been permanently destroyed since the financial crash. Now entire industries are threatened with extinction. The situation confronting car workers—with Ford plants scheduled for shutdown in 2016, and Holden management demanding huge wage cuts—is only one expression of a wider offensive against the social position of the entire working class.

As social inequality deepens, conditions for the vast majority of ordinary working people are rapidly deteriorating. For many, housing costs have already reached intolerable levels and household debt has jumped from 94 percent of income in 2000 to 150 percent today. The major banks have been the beneficiaries, amassing profits totalling \$25 billion in 2012. While finance capital rakes in record profits, social services, health and education are being gutted.

The SEP warns that the attacks so far will pale into relative

insignificance compared to the onslaught that will be implemented by whichever government comes to power in the next election.

### **The threat of dictatorship**

There is no popular support for such measures. The extreme volatility of opinion polls is just a pale reflection of the unprecedented alienation from and anger towards the entire official political set-up. All the parliamentary parties—Labor, Liberal-National and Greens—have lost the bulk of their former constituencies, and are mired in bitter internal controversies and conflicts. Increasingly the ruling elite, frustrated at its inability to achieve its agenda, will resort to extra-parliamentary, dictatorial measures in order to impose it, involving fundamental attacks on democratic rights.

The willingness of the Australian bourgeoisie to dispense with parliamentary democracy was demonstrated in the November 11, 1975 Canberra coup. The significance of the sacking of the democratically-elected Whitlam Labor government by forces including the CIA and Britain's MI6, and of Whitlam's own craven capitulation to his dismissal, was revealed in the subsequent transformation of the Labor Party. The next Labor government of Hawke and Keating abandoned any commitment to social reform, implementing instead a major "restructuring" of Australian capitalism in the interests of the corporate elite. Since 2007, the Labor government of Rudd and Gillard, building on the framework established by the Howard Liberal government under the banner of the bogus "war on terror," has erected the scaffolding of a police state.

The extent to which basic democratic rights have disintegrated has been most graphically revealed in the US. Former NSA contractor Edward Snowden has courageously exposed the vast, illegal electronic surveillance network used by the US state apparatus to spy on the American people and the world's population. Canberra is intimately involved in the NSA spying network as part of the US-led "Five Eyes" intelligence-sharing agreement, and through its involvement with US spy bases such as Pine Gap. The Obama administration's vendetta against Snowden demonstrates the lawless contempt in ruling circles for democratic rights and basic constitutional norms.

The Socialist Equality Party makes an urgent appeal to workers and young people to take up the defence of Snowden, as well as others targeted by US imperialism for exposing its crimes, including Julian Assange and Private Bradley Manning. This means building support in workplaces, universities, schools, and in working-class suburbs. The defence of Snowden, Assange and Manning must become the spearhead for the fight to defend democratic rights around the world.

All the work of the SEP is oriented to the development of an independent political movement of the working class to advance its own solution to the program of war, social counter-revolution and dictatorship through the fight for a workers' government and the socialist reorganisation of society.

The primary task of such a movement will be to establish its political independence from the capitalist two-party parliamentary system, and its various Greens and pseudo-left apologists. The pseudo-lefts fraudulently claim that Labor must be supported as a "lesser evil" to the Liberals. Like all lies, this serves a definite political purpose—to paralyse the working class and prevent its struggles from breaking out of the stranglehold of the Labor and union bureaucracies.

Equally pernicious is the pseudo-lefts' claim that workers can only fight for their interests through the auspices of the trade unions. The reality is that the unions are in no sense workers' organisations. Over the past three decades, the globalisation of production has completely shattered their old, limited, reformist programs, based on national regulation, and transformed them into nothing but an industrial police force for imposing the dictates of the major corporations, banks and finance capital onto the working class. Both Labor and the unions directly serve the interests of Australian and US imperialism.

The working class can only secure its independent class interests through mass social and political struggle. In the factories and workplaces, the SEP calls for the formation of new rank-and-file organisations—independent of, and opposed to the trade unions—which will fight to defend jobs, wages and conditions. We call, as well, for the formation of committees of action in neighbourhoods throughout the country, to develop mass social and political struggles against the austerity cuts to schools, universities, health facilities and other social services.

The SEP urges all workers, students, youth, socialist-minded intellectuals and professional people to give our election campaign your maximum support. While calling for the largest possible vote, our primary aim is not winning at the ballot box. Rather, it is to develop a new political movement of the working class and to imbue that movement with scientific socialist consciousness—the understanding that nothing less than the overthrow of the capitalist profit system and the establishment of world socialism is required to end the threat of world war, social devastation and dictatorship.

This necessitates, above all, the building of a new revolutionary leadership of the working class, in Australia and on an international scale. That is the perspective of the SEP and the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution, founded in 1938 by Leon Trotsky. The ICFI is the only party that consciously bases its political work on the great principles and program of revolutionary Marxism, embodied most powerfully in the struggle waged by Trotsky, co-leader with Lenin of the Russian Revolution, against Stalinism and all forms of national opportunism. We urge all those who agree with the necessity for socialism—for social equality and for an end to poverty, exploitation, oppression and war—to participate in the SEP's election campaign, become regular readers of the *World Socialist Web Site*, the Internet organ of the ICFI, to study our history, program and principles, and apply to join our ranks.

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