

Australian PM calls September 7 election

Patrick O'Connor
5 August 2013

The official campaign now underway after Prime Minister Kevin Rudd yesterday announced the federal election for September 7 constitutes an enormous fraud. None of the real issues confronting the working class will be openly discussed over the next four and a half weeks.

Moreover, not a single substantive issue separates any of the parliamentary parties, Labor, Liberal-National, and the Greens. Regardless of which party forms the next government, there will be an immediate escalation of pro-business economic restructuring and austerity measures, aimed at permanently lowering the living standards of working people. Similarly, Canberra's close collaboration with Washington's aggressive confrontation of China will continue, ratcheting up regional tensions and threatening a devastating war.

The minority Labor government has called the election amid a sharply escalating economic crisis. Announcing the date, Rudd emphasised that the China-driven mining investment boom "is over", adding that a "great economic transition therefore lies ahead." This "transition", he continued, raised "new challenges" that required "new ways of thinking, new ways of acting, new ways of planning."

This was a coded pledge to the corporate elite. Last Friday, Treasurer Chris Bowen released an updated economic statement revealing further revenue write-downs, of \$33 billion, and unveiling additional spending cuts. Similarly stressing the economic "transition" underway, Bowen declared that the Labor government would make whatever "difficult decisions" (i.e., further deep spending cuts), deemed necessary by finance capital to maintain the international competitiveness of Australian capitalism. Savage, European-style austerity measures are being prepared, aimed at eliminating social concessions previously fought for by the working class, including access to public healthcare, education and welfare entitlements.

Rudd's attempt to promote Labor as the anti-austerity alternative to the Liberal-National coalition is utterly bogus. The prime minister demagogically denounced opposition leader Tony Abbott's "\$70 billion slash and burn austerity drive, which will cut jobs and cut deeply into basic services in health and education." Rudd's desperate appeal for people to vote Labor on this "lesser evil" basis reflects the widespread public opposition to spending cuts that have already eroded basic social services and working class living standards.

The *Australian Financial Review's* (AFR) editorial today welcomed what it called the "first election of Australia's post-resources boom era", marking "the end of a decade of rising national prosperity." In reality, the "boom" resulted in the ultra-wealthy accumulating unprecedented personal fortunes while wide layers of the working class suffered stagnating wages, insecure employment, and rising costs of living. The AFR nevertheless advised Abbott to ignore "Labor scare campaigns" and work to "extract a mandate from the Australian people to effectively deal with the end of easy prosperity."

In reality, no mandate can be secured for the agenda of austerity and demands for higher "productivity" that will accelerate the destruction of jobs and working conditions. There is no social constituency for such regressive measures, outside the narrow ultra-wealthy stratum at the apex of society.

The election campaign will be marked by a series of political diversions, while new and antidemocratic forms of rule are prepared behind the scenes. The reactionary targeting of refugee arrivals serves both these ends. After being reinstalled as prime minister on June 27, Rudd immediately went further than his predecessor, Julia Gillard, openly junking any adherence to the basic precepts of international law governing the treatment of asylum seekers. His "Papua

New Guinea solution” involves deporting refugees arriving by sea to the impoverished former Australian colony, with no possibility of ever being allowed to enter Australia. On Saturday, Rudd announced he had struck a similar agreement with the neighbouring micro-state of Nauru.

The major parties are attempting to divert social tensions by scapegoating refugees and asylum seekers for escalating cost-of-living pressures and deteriorating public services. The Australian ruling class has decades of experience in whipping up nationalism and xenophobia.

At the same time, the Rudd government’s illegal treatment of asylum seekers presages the wider repressive and extra-legal measures against any resistance by the working class to attacks on jobs and living standards. NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden has revealed just how far Washington and its allies including Canberra have gone in erecting the framework for a police state.

The Greens are attempting to win support, especially among young people, by appealing to the disgust and opposition created by the major parties’ anti-refugee policies. Their posturing as a “humane” alternative is a fraud. The Greens loyally served for nearly three years as the junior partners of the Labor minority government under Gillard, who paved the way for the present policy with her revival of the former Howard government’s “Pacific Solution”, her plan to deport refugees to Malaysia, and the unlawful “no advantage” test, under which even officially recognised refugees would be detained for years as a punitive deterrent to others. Throughout, the Greens maintained their support for the government, voting for every annual budget, including the provisions that funded the running of Australian and Pacific detention centres.

Likewise, the Greens are proven supporters of austerity cuts. A bourgeois party whose primary social base is an affluent layer of the middle class, the Greens have openly boasted of their record in implementing regressive spending cuts targeting the working class, in Tasmania as part of both Labor- and Liberal-led coalitions and as de facto coalition partners of Gillard’s federal Labor government. This record underscores the Greens’ role as a central component of the political establishment in Australia.

There is now an unparalleled level of alienation and

disgust among ordinary people with the entire parliamentary set up. The Labor Party has no genuine base within the working class, after spending the last three decades ruthlessly advancing the interests of big business and finance capital at the federal and state levels of government. In an implicit acknowledgement of widespread public hostility towards the party, Rudd used the word “Labor” just once in his election announcement.

One symptom of the breakup of the two-party parliamentary system is the record number of political parties contesting the election, 54, despite additional antidemocratic financial and regulatory hurdles erected by the major parties in an attempt to block smaller parties.

Only one party, however, offers a genuine alternative for the working class—the Socialist Equality Party. The SEP is fielding Senate candidates in each of the five mainland states—New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia.

The urgent task confronting workers and young people is to intervene into the situation in defence of their own independent class interests against war and militarism, austerity and the accelerating assault on democratic rights. The SEP’s campaign for a socialist and internationalist program provides the vehicle for this intervention. It alone has been raising the critical issues confronting workers and young people in this period, including the US-led war drive against China, which will not be discussed by any of the parliamentary parties in the course of the campaign. We urge workers, students, youth, socialist-minded intellectuals and professional people to give our election campaign your maximum support and to join the struggle to build the SEP as the new mass revolutionary party of the working class.

*Authorised by Nick Beams, 113/55 Flemington Rd,
North Melbourne VIC 3051*



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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