

Australian Greens posture as “compassionate” alternative

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The Greens' election platform, released last month, underscores the thoroughly duplicitous role being played by the party within the parliamentary set up.

Amid widespread hostility among ordinary people toward both the major parties, the Greens are seeking to channel anger and social discontent, especially among young people, back behind the political establishment. Posturing as “progressive” and “compassionate” opponents of the Labor and Liberal parties, the Greens are preparing to work closely after the election with whichever party takes office, in order to ensure parliamentary “stability” on behalf of the ruling elite.

In her introduction to the 50-page platform, titled “Standing up for what matters,” Greens' leader Christine Milne boasts of the role the party played following the 2010 election, which delivered the first hung parliament in 70 years. The Greens, she explained, “provided stability, integrity.” Through their agreement with then Prime Minister Julia Gillard to back the minority Labor government, the Greens “worked with all parties to improve and then pass the vast bulk of the [government's] legislative agenda.” Milne added that this “delivered the biggest environmental, economic and social reform for decades.”

What a fraud! The Greens-backed Gillard government was from the outset an instrument of big business and finance capital, representing reaction all down the line.

On foreign policy, Gillard fully aligned Australian imperialism with Washington's preparations for war against China, agreeing to a heightened US military presence on Australian territory, including basing US Marines in Darwin. She backed every US-led predatory operation around the world, also actively assisting the Obama administration's vendetta against WikiLeaks and Julian Assange.

At home, Gillard's so-called reforms involved ruthless attacks on the living conditions and democratic rights of

the working class and the most vulnerable layers of society, including students, the unemployed, disabled, Aborigines and refugees. Gillard initiated the turn to austerity, involving one round after another of regressive budget cuts, all of which the Greens voted for. While allowing the mining companies to pay near zero tax after their representatives were permitted to rewrite the resource super profits tax, Gillard plunged single parents into poverty by forcing them onto the unemployment benefits.

On asylum seekers, Gillard introduced an even more punitive and lawless version of the former Howard government's “Pacific Solution.” This paved the way for Rudd's permanent deportations of refugees to Papua New Guinea—a policy that the Greens now hypocritically denounce as “cruel.”

The Greens' enthusiastic embrace of this record underscores the cynicism of their posturing as some kind of progressive alternative to Labor.

The Greens are ready to work with either of the major parties, including in coalition, in the event of another hung parliament. Milne herself has experience in Tasmanian state politics working within coalition governments with Labor (1989-1992) and the Liberals (1996-1998). In both instances, severe budget cuts were implemented with the crucial support of the Greens. Referring to the cost-cutting measures imposed under the Liberal-Greens alliance, Milne later boasted that the Greens “never wavered from the task.” They are now prepared to help implement the far more sweeping cuts that are being prepared against the working class by both Rudd and Abbott.

The Greens have sought to promote a grab bag of new policies and taxes in their platform—yet they will be ready to abandon every single proposal if an opportunity arises to form an alliance with one of the major parties. In 2010, the party signed a deal with Gillard without her agreeing

to implement any of the Greens' primary policy measures.

The Greens' proposals are nevertheless striking in their paucity. Claiming to stand up for the unemployed, for example, they demand the Newstart benefit increase by just \$50 a week, still leaving it far below the poverty line. Some business groups have made the same demand, because the present benefit is so low that many unemployed do not have the money to travel to job interviews.

Claiming to be opponents of corporate "greed" and regressive tax systems, the Greens want the mining resource rent tax increased from 25 to 40 percent, a 0.2 percent bank levy imposed on assets greater than \$100 billion, and a 50 percent tax on annual personal incomes over \$1 million. These meagre initiatives would raise less than \$43 billion over three years. No change is proposed to company tax, which over the past quarter century has been slashed from 49 percent to 30 percent under successive Labor and Liberal governments, providing a boon to big corporations and the ultra-wealthy.

The limited character of these measures reflects the interests of the party's core social base—an affluent layer of the middle class. Greens' members are predominantly tertiary educated professionals, enjoying above average incomes. The party defends its proposed "millionaire's tax" by noting that it would affect just 10,000 individuals, or 0.1 percent of the population, leaving the incomes of others in the top 10 percent of society untouched.

The Greens also represent important sections of big business. Its platform proposes to reallocate existing tax concessions for the mining and fossil fuels industry to the "green" energy sector. The party wants to triple funding for the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, an investment vehicle for supplying credit to the renewable energy sector, from \$10 billion to \$30 billion over the next ten years. This would mark a significant windfall for the privately owned hydroelectricity, wind and solar energy conglomerates.

The party also has close connections with sections of finance capital that stand to reap enormous profits through the emissions trading scheme enacted via Gillard's carbon tax. The Greens' enthusiastic support for the carbon tax—through which greenhouse gas emissions in Australia have actually significantly increased—exposed the party's bogus posturing as champions of the environment. All their proposals on climate change accept the framework of the capitalist market, which is responsible for the global environmental crisis.

On foreign policy, the Greens have long abandoned their antiwar posturing during the US invasion of Iraq. Their opposition to the Iraq war was purely tactical—the Greens argued that the Australian military had to serve the country's imperialist interests closer to home, in the Asia Pacific region. Similarly, the Greens have helped the so-called war on terror, assisting the passage of anti-democratic legislation under the former Howard government. Like their international counterparts in Europe and elsewhere, they have always been a party of war, supporting every predatory intervention of the Australian state in the South Pacific, including most notably the 1999 operation in East Timor that secured control of the territory's substantial oil and gas reserves.

The Greens' 2013 election platform argues for a more assertive role for Australian imperialism, urging the government to boost the country's "standing as a middle power" and use its current UN Security Council seat, and presidency of the G20 beginning next year, to "reassert our nation's role as a constructive and independent player in the international community." The document is completely silent on the Labor government's military agreements with Washington, which form part of the Obama administration's aggressive preparations against China. In November 2011, when Obama used the Australian parliament to announce his "pivot to Asia" to counter China, Greens' parliamentarians rushed to shake his hand.

Last December, the Greens officially junked their nominal opposition to the US-Australian military alliance, including their previous token call to "end the ANZUS treaty, unless Australia's membership can be revised in a manner which is consistent with Australia's international and human rights obligations." This was a clear signal to Washington that the Greens would present no opposition to its war plans. The Greens have also lent support to anti-China campaigns waged by sections of business, with their policy platform indicating their opposition to further Chinese investment in Australian mining and farming interests.

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