

# Australia: Greens promoted at refugee protests

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Thousands of youth, as well as workers and retirees, attended “Let the Refugees in” rallies in Australian cities last weekend. The demonstrations were in opposition to the Labor government’s attack on refugees’ democratic right to claim asylum in Australia. In flagrant violation of international law, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is permanently deporting asylum seekers arriving by boat to Nauru and Papua New Guinea.

About 2,000 people listened to speakers outside the State Library in central Melbourne, and then marched to Treasury Gardens carrying a range of banners and placards defending asylum seekers. In Sydney, approximately 500 people demonstrated at the Town Hall, and in Perth, several hundred people, including high school students, protested at the Forrest Chase Mall.

Organisers used the protests, held just two weeks prior to the September 7 federal election, to promote the Greens. The Greens, together with sections of the trade union bureaucracy, postured as opponents of the government that they have backed for the last three years.

Requests by Socialist Equality Party Senate candidate Patrick O’Connor to address the Melbourne demonstration were rejected out of hand by the Refugee Action Collective. The organisers were clearly determined to prevent any political challenge to the Greens.

Greens Senate candidates Dianne Hiles and Kate Davis spoke in Sydney and Perth respectively. In Melbourne, Greens candidate for the seat of Batman, Alex Bhathal, described Labor’s policies as “bizarre and ineffective.” She proposed one of the recommendations of the Houston report to increase the intake of asylum seekers in Indonesia. Former Labor

Prime Minister Julia Gillard used the Houston report to justify the restoration of the “Pacific Solution,” the policy of the previous Howard Liberal government, and the imposition of a so-called no advantage test which condemns refugees to years of detention.

The Greens accept the reactionary nationalist framework of “border protection,” but propose to give it a more humanitarian façade. Bhathal promoted the Greens’ proposal to boost the annual humanitarian intake to 30,000, up from the current 20,000.

Similarly Victorian Trades Hall spokesman Luke Hilakari briefly spoke about the importance of treating asylum seekers with “respect” and welcoming them into the community.

Pseudo-left groups such as Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative have played a crucial role in promoting the Greens and the unions at these and other demonstrations during the election campaign.

In Perth, a Socialist Alliance chairperson welcomed Civil Service Association (CSA) Rickey Hendon declaring, it is “awesome to see union flags ... [and] union banners at the rally.”

Hendon told the rally that the unions were “built on principles equity and justice and human rights, the right to work ... We want an Australia we can be proud of.” The unions, she said, were fighting for “change in policy whoever wins government Labor or Liberal.”

These claims are a fraud. The unions have a long record of promoting the most vile forms of Australian nationalism, including White Australia racism. Currently, the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union is campaigning against foreign workers on 457 visas taking Australian jobs.

*World Socialist Web Site* reporters interviewed several people attending the rallies in Melbourne, Sydney and Perth.

In Perth, schoolteacher **Pilal** said, “I am calculating the move to **here** because the Labor and Liberal governments are a throwback to the White Australia policy and it is untrue and unacceptable to stop asylum seekers rights. It is a despicable example of dog whistle politics and it makes no sense—morally or economically.”

In Melbourne, **Joe**, an unemployed factory worker from Broadmeadows, said, “I came today because I strongly want a humanitarian response to asylum seekers. I was absolutely shocked at Labor’s decision to send refugees to Manus Island in PNG. I will not be voting for Labor ever again. I’ve gone along with them for a long time but that’s the deal breaker.

“Bringing this issue into the centre of the election campaign is terrible. I even heard the other day Abbott calling it a ‘national emergency.’ The numbers of asylum seekers arriving are just a tiny drop in the ocean. What national emergency?

“People are coming here because they have been displaced. The governments, like America and Australia, have caused these wars like in the Middle East and people are now desperately fleeing the wars. People are coming here in fear of their lives at home, they have to get out. If I was in the same situation as these people I would have to get out of my country too ... Labor has been losing me for quite a while. They are not the workers’ party. I once loved the Labor Party in the ‘70s, under Whitlam when they had alternative policies and social values.”

In Sydney, **Lorelei** said she was “very passionate about this cause.” She told WSWS reporters: “I’m really ashamed to be Australian at the moment, with the current policies given out by both sides of politics. I just think it’s inhumane the way we as a country are treating refugees. When a government is worried about itself financially, they will demonise minority groups and use them as a scapegoat ...”

**Ben**, a fine art student in Melbourne, said, “I’m sick of the Australian government’s attitude to refugees. There’s a feeling of fear amongst people of refugees. I felt that at one time ... I definitely don’t support Labor. I don’t support this position they have on refugees although I’m not surprised by it. They are not a progressive party.

“It’s interesting that we would kick back refugees that have come from countries that Australia has been part of destroying. It seems like an obvious and

They’ve sown all this fear of Afghans and Iranians. In some ways it’s a logical decision to close the borders to them—in a terrible way.”



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