

The way forward in the fight against budget austerity and militarism

The Socialist Equality Party (Australia)
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On July 6, thousands of people across Australia will again rally in demonstrations that reflect the deeply-felt opposition of millions toward the sweeping cutbacks to social services and welfare contained in the Abbott government's 2014 budget.

A major factor in the popular shock at the budget measures was the incessant insistence, by the political establishment and the corporate media, since the onset of the 2008 global financial crisis, that Australia would not be severely impacted. Lie after lie was promoted to try and prove that the type of austerity being imposed in the United States and Europe would never take place here. In reality, as world economic conditions continued to deteriorate, the former Gillard Labor government initiated unprecedented long-term cuts to public spending, which the Abbott government is now qualitatively escalating.

Now that it is apparent that the agenda of the Abbott government is to effectively destroy what remains of the social welfare state, and to drastically worsen the conditions faced by millions of people, more lies are being advanced to prevent the working class from mobilising in a genuine struggle to defend its basic interests. For weeks, the unions and various protest organisers have claimed that all that needs to be done to “bust the budget” is to appeal to the Senate to prevent the measures being passed.

This dishonest and cynical campaign is being directed by political forces—the unions, various pro-Labor figures, the Greens and the pseudo-left groups such as Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance—whose only opposition to the budget is that it is being carried out by a Liberal government. Their unstated but transparent aim is to keep the mounting opposition confined to the parliamentary arena, before channelling it back into the dead-end perspective of returning a Greens-backed Labor government whenever the next election is held.

It is time for the working class to draw the lessons from

its bitter experiences with the Labor Party and the unions, particularly over the past 30 years. At every point, Labor has worked to drive down workers' conditions, in order to benefit corporate “international competitiveness” and profitability, and the incomes and asset portfolios of the rich. As for the unions, they have fully collaborated in the wholesale economic restructuring overseen by both Labor and Liberal governments, and share responsibility for the staggering levels of social inequality that have resulted. By the time Labor was thrown out of office last year, the richest 1 percent of the population owned the same wealth as the bottom 60 percent.

The utter fraud of the claims that the budget would be stopped in the Senate was demonstrated on June 25. For all the sound and fury that Labor and the Greens have vented against the Abbott government, they voted to pass the appropriation bills.

The legislation ratified by Labor and the Greens included cuts to thousands more public sector jobs and the slashing of federal health and education funding to the states by \$80 billion over 10 years. Both parties also voted to cut foreign aid by \$7.6 billion over the next five years and to allocate nearly \$3 billion to the government's brutal “border protection” regime and its illegal detention of refugees in prison camps on Manus Island and Nauru.

At the same time, sordid back-room deals are underway with the new Senators, who were elected in last September's federal election, to secure the votes necessary to implement the rest of the budget. Even if the government agrees to make token modification to the plans to strip the young unemployed of benefits, cut welfare payments, increase the retirement age to 70 and impose upfront payments for medical care, the basic thrust of its agenda will go through.

The passage of the appropriation bills by Labor and the Greens demonstrates that the budget measures are not simply the outcome of the right-wing ideological views of

Abbott, Treasurer Hockey and others in the Liberal-National coalition. They are the response by the parliamentary establishment as a whole to the global economic crisis and the demands of the financial elites in every country to make the working class pay for the consequences of their reckless and often criminal activities.

Greens' leader Christine Milne spoke for all the big business parties when she explained why her party had ignored thousands of appeals that it block the budget. "We are not going to cause a constitutional crisis," she stated on June 25. "The Greens are here as very strong and reliable people in this parliament."

The Socialist Equality Party insists that the working class must establish its complete political independence from Labor, the Greens, the unions and the entire parliamentary establishment. There is no way forward against the Abbott government's measures with a perspective that aims at nothing more than substituting one capitalist party for another, as they collaborate in imposing the dictates of the financial and corporate elite.

Workers and youth need to base themselves on the clear understanding that a systemic failure of the global capitalist system is underway. The economic breakdown is giving rise not only to the assault on the living standards of the working class, but the drive toward war. Just as in the years before World War I and World War II, every part of the globe is now wracked by bitter conflicts over control of markets, resources and sources of profits.

Preparations for war with China are at the very centre of the Abbott government's budget and the agenda of the entire Australian ruling class. Behind the backs of the population, the former Labor government fully committed Australia to the US "pivot" to Asia, which consists of military and diplomatic provocations against China to compel it to submit to the economic domination of the Wall Street banks and investment funds.

Marines are now based in Darwin, while the Pine Gap spy station continues to play a central role in the ongoing US-led wars of aggression in the Middle East and Central Asia. The Abbott government has seamlessly continued where the Gillard government left off—extending its own unconditional support for the US "pivot" and entering into new arrangements for the greater use of Australian bases by US aircraft, ships and submarines. From the Asia-Pacific to Afghanistan, the Australian military functions as an integral part of the American war machine.

That is why Labor and the Greens voted with the Coalition to increase annual defence spending by nearly

20 percent, lifting it to \$27.6 billion by 2017–18. Tens of billions more had already been allocated by the former Labor government toward the purchase of new warships, F-35 jet fighters and other hardware. A further \$35 billion will be found to acquire a new fleet of submarines for the Navy, the largest military purchase in Australian history.

Last week, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop openly spoke of the possibility that the tensions currently being provoked by the US pivot in the East and South China Seas could "unleash forces that quickly spiral out of control" and trigger war.

The vast web of relations between American and Australian finance means the Australian ruling class sees its interests as inseparable from those of US imperialism. The policy of the entire Australian establishment is to participate alongside the US and Japan in a war with China, which would risk escalating into a nuclear conflagration. That catastrophic prospect will be high on the agenda of the talks Abbott holds in Canberra this week with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, another key ally of US militarism in the Asian region.

Social inequality, austerity and repression at home, intrigue and war internationally. That is the future for workers and youth in every country under the capitalist profit system.

The Socialist Equality Party, alongside its co-thinkers around the world, advances a socialist and internationalist perspective to guide the working class in the struggle to take political power and establish a workers' government. Such a government would place the banks and major industries under public ownership and democratic control, and radically redistribute social wealth to end poverty and inequality. At the same time it would close down all military bases and redirect the vast resources currently being squandered on the military to socially useful purposes. We urge all workers and youth who want to fight austerity, war and the escalating assault on democratic rights to join our party and the fight for world socialism.



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