

Another palace coup in Australia

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The ousting of Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott and his replacement by Malcolm Turnbull in a leadership spill within the ruling Liberal Party, was all over on Monday in a matter of hours. For the third time in five years, the Australian population awoke yesterday to find the government changed, behind their backs, as a result of sordid scheming and manoeuvres by small cabals of powerbrokers operating on behalf of powerful corporate interests.

In June 2010, Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was removed in an overnight inner-party coup. Three years later, he master-minded the same anti-democratic procedure against his replacement, Julia Gillard, weeks before the 2013 election that brought Abbott to office. In the case of the coup against Rudd, powerful Labor Party factional interests coincided with Washington's hostility to his failure to fully align with US machinations against China.

The propensity for palace coups in Australia reflects the putrefaction of the official parties and institutions of bourgeois democracy. The profound alienation of the vast majority of the population from all the major political parties—Liberal, National, Labor and Greens—is the product of a decades-long assault on the jobs, wages and living standards of the working class, and the concentration of obscene levels of wealth in the hands of a tiny minority.

The Labor and Liberal parties that have dominated Australian politics since World War II are hollowed-out shells with declining membership numbers and staffed by self-serving cliques of politicians and their retinues. Their paper membership figures—about 54,000 for Labor and 70,000 for Liberal—bear no relationship to the miniscule numbers participating in the political process.

It is only in this fetid and moribund political environment that individual politicians and factional powerbrokers are able to orchestrate the overnight

removal of a prime minister, undermining the results of national elections, without fear of a rebellion in their party ranks. The resort to such methods has only intensified in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis. In Greece and Italy unelected technocratic governments have been installed at various times over the past seven years to impose the austerity dictates of finance capital. While initially somewhat shielded from the full force of the international economic breakdown by the demand for Australian mineral exports, the slowdown in China and falling commodity prices are now hitting the Australian economy hard.

Deeply frustrated by the failure of the Abbott government to impose their austerity agenda against the working class, powerful sections of big business have turned to Turnbull to carry out the task. As a former Goldman Sachs banker, Turnbull epitomises the interests of finance capital. Whereas Abbott headed the Liberal Party's conservative wing, casting himself as a right-wing populist, Turnbull has sought to make a more "progressive" appeal to layers of the upper middle class on issues such as gay marriage and climate change.

While yesterday the BBC, mouthing similar responses throughout the international media, cast Australia as the "coup capital of the democratic world," economic crisis and political turmoil are becoming the norm in every country. Increasingly, the ruling classes are resorting to openly anti-democratic methods to prosecute their factional interests against rival groupings and to deepen the devastating onslaught on the living standards of working people.

The campaign for the 2016 US presidential election is a case in point. It has been reduced to a race between the bought and paid for candidates of tiny groups of multi-millionaires and billionaires, who provide the tens of millions of dollars needed just to run in the primaries. In the case of billionaire Donald Trump, he

has decided to run himself rather than resort to a political proxy.

Elsewhere, the decay and outright collapse of longstanding establishment parties is compelling the bourgeoisie to turn to new political mechanisms to implement its anti-working class agenda. This has led to the rise of new political formations of both the extreme right, such as the National Front in France, and the pseudo-left, such as Syriza in Greece.

In Britain, the promotion of Jeremy Corbyn as a “left” political safety valve and his election as leader of the Labour Party has exposed the rot in official politics. The overwhelming landslide vote for Corbyn and the humiliating defeat of his Blairite pro-market opponents for the position, provided just a glimpse of the seething hostility within the working class to the entire political establishment and its austerity agenda.

This week’s upheaval in Canberra underscores yet again the necessity for the working class to develop its political independence from all the parties of big business. The willingness of both Labor and Liberal parliamentarians to resort to such intrigues and manoeuvres to reorganise governments, in complete disregard of even the most basic democratic norms, constitutes a warning. It anticipates the ruthless measures that will be used against the working class as it comes forward to fight against the savage cuts demanded by the corporate and financial elite.

The only way that the working class can defend its social needs and democratic rights is by building an independent political movement on the basis of a socialist program that addresses the root cause of widening social inequality, repression and the drive to war—the profit system itself. The only party that fights for such a program is the Socialist Equality Party.



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