

Australia: Pseudo-lefts promote the Greens' posturing on refugees

Patrick Kelly
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A rally organised in Melbourne on Saturday by the Refugee Action Collective underscored the determination of various pseudo-left organisations to divert mounting anger over the government's criminal persecution of refugees and asylum seekers behind the Greens, ahead of a looming federal election.

About 1,000 people rallied in opposition to the Liberal-National government's reaction to the latest refugee death at the Australian-run detention camp on the Pacific Island state of Nauru. A 23-year-old Iranian man, Omid Masoumali, committed suicide last week by setting himself alight. His death was a desperate act of protest, following a meeting on the island with the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR. UN officials informed Masoumali and other refugees that they would remain on Nauru for another 10 years. He had already been incarcerated there for 3 years.

Masoumali's death came just after the Papua New Guinean Supreme Court ruled that Australia's other "offshore" refugee detention centre, on Manus Island, was illegal and had to be closed down. The Turnbull government, backed by the Labor Party, responded with contempt and indifference to both the Manus ruling and the Nauru suicide, insisting that the current regime of compulsory deportation and denial of refugee status to any asylum claimants arriving by boat, would continue unaltered.

Amid widespread public outrage, the Melbourne rally served as a thinly veiled election campaign event for the Greens. The main speakers were Greens' federal leader Richard Di Natale and the party's member for the electorate of Melbourne, Adam Bandt.

The Refugee Action Collective is a group dominated by the pseudo-left. Its demonstration was co-chaired by Amanda Zivcic, a member of Socialist Alliance, and Chris Breen, of Solidarity (aligned with the British

Socialist Workers Party). Like their international counterparts, the pseudo-left organisations in Australia are pressing for a more prominent role within the political establishment.

Breen told the demonstration: "We would love to see an election where the Labor Party actually stood up to the [Liberal-National] Coalition on refugees, because it's been politically winnable ... There are voices in the Labor Party calling for a different policy but they need to be louder."

Zivcic declared: "The Greens have been one of the few voices inside parliament which routinely oppose mandatory detention and strive for a more humane refugee policy."

These statements served to whitewash the political architects of some of the world's most brutal and blatantly illegal anti-refugee policies.

For decades, the Greens have acted as accomplices of both the major parties. The Labor Party first introduced the mandatory detention of asylum seekers in Australia in 1992, under the Keating government. Between 2010 and 2013, the Greens became the parliamentary partner of the Labor minority government of Julia Gillard, providing the support it needed to stay in power. During this period, Gillard drafted legislation that went beyond the draconian anti-refugee measures introduced by the Liberal-National Coalition under John Howard.

The Greens-backed Gillard Labor government revived and extended Howard's so-called "Pacific Solution," adding a mandatory period of several years' offshore imprisonment, even for officially recognised refugees, as a means of "detering" other asylum seekers from entering the country. When Kevin Rudd briefly returned as Labor prime minister in 2013, he went even further in repudiating international refugee law, legislating that refugees arriving in Australia by

boat would be deported and never permitted to return.

The Abbott-Turnbull Coalition governments have retained these measures over the past three years, with the Labor and Liberal parties now inseparable on refugee policy.

In this context, the Greens function as a political safety valve for the ruling elite, promoting the myth that the parliamentary set-up—and specifically, Labor, can be pressured to provide a more “humane” system for refugees. At the same time, the Greens determinedly maintain the basic political premise behind the brutal “fortress Australia” policy: that the state should forcibly block or regulate the movement of refugees and undocumented immigrants into Australia, denying what should be the basic right of every person to live and work, with full citizenship rights, wherever they wish.

The Greens’ polite differences with the major parties’ refugee policies did not prevent them from joining their de facto coalition with Gillard’s minority government. And last year, Di Natale announced that he would not dismiss entering a fully-fledged coalition with either Labor or Liberal after the next election.

Speaking to the media before Saturday’s rally began, Di Natale declared: “I appeal to Labor and Liberal—work with us ... I call on Bill Shorten and Malcolm Turnbull to work with us and find safer pathways for asylum seekers.” He referred to “growing pressure from the corporate sector” for a policy shift, and added a personal appeal to Turnbull: “Show that you are different to Tony Abbott, show that you have a warm heart.”

After a fulsome introduction from the pseudo-left, the Greens’ leader then addressed the rally, again appealing to Turnbull “to show the world that Australia is a decent, compassionate place.” As well as seeking to divert public hostility to the treatment of refugees back behind the political establishment, the Greens speak for corporate and financial interests that regard Australia’s current immigration policies as economically inefficient and damaging to the country’s international reputation.



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