

Australian PM announces “double-dissolution” election for July 2

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Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has placed the build-up of the armed forces, part of the growing military escalation by the United States and its allies against China, at the centre of the Liberal-National Party government’s campaign for the July 2 federal election, announced on Sunday.

Speaking after he announced the double-dissolution election, which requires that all 150 seats in the lower house and all 76 seats in the upper house, the Senate, be declared vacant, Turnbull painted a portrait of Australia completely divorced from reality, as he laid out the coalition government’s election campaign.

The prime minister ignored the deepening crisis of the global economy, marked by continuing stagnation in the major centres and a downturn in China, asserting that Australians “live in a time of remarkable opportunity,” an “exciting time,” and that on the basis of the government’s “plan” for jobs and economic growth “we will succeed as we have never succeeded before.”

The agenda he proceeded to spell out, however, consists of war preparations and attacks on the social and democratic rights of the working class.

At the centre of the government’s so-called plan—the first concrete item Turnbull touched on in his speech—is the massive expansion of the armed forces outlined in the 2016 Defence White Paper. Some \$194 billion will be squandered over the next 10 years on the purchase of new aircraft, warships, armoured fighting vehicles, missile systems and submarines. Total military spending will reach \$495 billion. Turnbull also boasted of a new \$2.5 billion military agreement with Singapore, which will see 14,000 Singaporean troops train for 18 weeks a year at Australian bases.

The expansion of the military and de-facto alliances in Asia flow directly from Australia’s commitment to the US “pivot to Asia,” which, since 2011, has consisted of escalating preparations for confrontation and war with China. Even as Turnbull held up China as one of the major “opportunities” for Australian business, Canberra is backing

the US as it steadily intensifies diplomatic and military pressure on Beijing. Tensions will reach new heights in the course of the Australian election campaign, when the UN Permanent Court of Arbitration brings down a ruling that is expected to declare Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea “illegal” under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The Beijing regime has categorically stated it will not recognise any such decision.

This election, which, under normal circumstances would have been held later in the year, is the outcome of the immense turmoil that has engulfed the Australian political establishment since the 2007–2008 financial crisis and the turn by US imperialism toward military confrontation with China—Australia’s largest export market. In 2014, a boom in mining exports to China, which temporarily staved off the full impact of the global economic slump, came to a shattering end. The Australian economy is now sliding into deflation and toward its first recession in 25 years. Jobs are being destroyed in the thousands across every sector of the economy. Accurate (i.e., unofficial) estimates put unemployment at over 11 percent and underemployment at 7.8 percent.

The global economic instability and rising geo-strategic conflicts have been expressed in unprecedented political volatility, and tensions between and within all of the establishment parties. In 2010, Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was removed in an inner-party factional coup. In the elections that followed, Labor, led by Julia Gillard, failed to win a majority and was forced to form the first minority government since 1941. In September 2015, Coalition Prime Minister Tony Abbott was ousted before he had even served two years, in a party-room coup led by Turnbull.

Since being installed as prime minister, Turnbull has been compelled to balance between corporate demands for massive cutbacks to public spending, to address burgeoning budget deficits, and the enormous anger and alienation among masses of people over declining incomes, astronomical housing costs, deteriorating social services and ever-widening social inequality.

Resorting to a desperate political gamble, Turnbull has staked everything on an early double-dissolution election delivering the governing Liberal and National Party Coalition not only a majority in the lower house, but also a majority in the Senate, so it can push through its agenda unimpeded.

The necessary constitutional “trigger” for the double dissolution was provided in April. Labor, the Greens and the so-called “independents,” who held the majority in the Senate, refused to pass government legislation re-establishing a draconian industrial commission with sweeping powers to investigate alleged “corruption” involving the trade unions in the construction industry. Ever since the Coalition won government from Labor in 2013, the Senate has blocked major pieces of its legislation.

The economic component of Turnbull’s “plan” is a steady decline in the corporate tax rate from 30 percent to 25 percent. While promising corporations a near \$50 billion windfall due to reductions in tax, the Coalition intends to impose savage cuts to various social welfare programs; raise the retirement age to 70; dragoon young unemployed workers into a cheap labour “internship” scheme; and starve public health and public education of funding.

The other key plank of the Coalition’s election policies is the maintenance of the brutal and illegal policy of denying refugees their right to claim asylum in Australia, and imprisoning them in detention centres located on remote Pacific Islands.

The opposition Labor Party and its leader Bill Shorten are in full agreement with the Coalition’s foreign policy alignment with US imperialism in the Asia-Pacific and internationally. It was the former Labor government that committed Australia to the US “pivot” in 2011. The two major parties also have bipartisan agreement on refugee policy and will combine to try and prevent any discussion during the election campaign on the dangers of war and the criminal abuse of asylum seekers.

The nakedly pro-big business policies of the Coalition, however, have been seized upon by both Labor and the Greens to launch populist campaigns, denouncing the government for representing the “millionaires” and “billionaires” and making demagogic commitments to greater social spending. Labor and the Greens have carefully studied how presidential aspirant and self-styled “democratic socialist” Bernie Sanders has used similar rhetoric to garner support in the US Democratic Party primary elections.

Given the volatile state of mass sentiment, the Coalition led by Turnbull may well be thrown from power and go down in history as the first one-term government since 1931. As in the US and numerous other countries, the predictable

two-party dominated parliamentary system in Australia is breaking down, under the impact of external and internal stresses and tensions.

The reality is that the period ahead will be one of accelerating class conflict as the financial and corporate elite demands that the next government—regardless of which party or coalition of parties takes office—imposes the burden of the crisis on the working class through ruthless austerity cutbacks to public spending and attacks on wages and conditions. If Labor wins, it will begin throwing out its election promises the day after the polling booths close.

None of the capitalist parties or candidates has anything to offer workers and young people except social devastation, deepening attacks on democratic rights and war. The only party that will speak for the independent interests of the working class will be the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), the Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

The SEP will stand candidates for the Senate and in selected lower house seats to fight, above all, to build a new international anti-war movement against the immense dangers posed by militarism and the growing geo-strategic conflicts between the major powers internationally. The campaign of the SEP will be international in character and addressed to the working class not only in Australia but throughout the Asia-Pacific region. It will be carried out in the closest collaboration with the election campaigns being waged by the Socialist Equality Party (US) and the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit in Germany, as well as with the fight of the SEP (UK) for an active boycott of the Brexit referendum on the UK’s membership of the European Union.

The SEP will advance, against Labor, the Coalition, the Greens and all pro-capitalist candidates, including those of the pseudo-left organisation Socialist Alliance, a genuine socialist and internationalist program to mobilise the working class against the source of war, social inequality and dictatorship—the capitalist profit system itself.

The SEP’s election statement and candidates will be announced over the coming week. We urge WSWs readers to like the SEP Australia Facebook page and follow and help promote the campaign, as it develops, to the widest possible audience within Australia, throughout the Asia-Pacific region and internationally.



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