

Australia: The promotion of Senator Jacqui Lambie

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One of the most right-wing nationalist groups being given considerable coverage by the mainstream media for the July 2 Australian federal election is the Jacqui Lambie Network (JLN), set up just a year ago by the senator of the same name.

Lambie cannot claim to have mass support or political credibility. The former soldier and military police officer won a Senate seat in Tasmania at the 2013 election, as a member of mining magnate Clive Palmer's self-styled Palmer United Party (PUP).

Palmer's party hoodwinked many voters by claiming to represent an anti-establishment alternative to the three major parties—Labor, Liberal-National and Greens. PUP has since become so discredited that it has not yet announced any candidates for 2016 and appears on the verge of collapse.

As a PUP candidate, Lambie picked up about 7 percent of the statewide vote in Tasmania and secured a Senate spot via preference-swapping deals with various other groups. Once Palmer's party began to disintegrate, Lambie jumped from his sinking ship, without advancing any political differences with him. Her JLN has announced Senate tickets in Tasmania and Victoria, and has said it will also run Senate candidates in New South Wales and Queensland.

Despite her chequered history, Lambie was featured again on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation television's nationally broadcast "Q&A" program on May 30. It was her second appearance for the year, and fourth within two years. Alongside another "third party" senator, Nick Xenophon, she was presented as a candidate to hold the "balance of power" after July 2.

JLN is one of a number of right-wing formations being given prominence because of growing signs that the popular hostility to the major parties could result in another "hung parliament"—with no party able to

command a majority. The media, corporate and political establishment is seeking to channel this disaffection back into the parliamentary framework.

Media outlets routinely describe Lambie as "outspoken." The truth is that her views are xenophobic, bigoted and authoritarian. She seeks to whip up Australian patriotism as a means of diverting mounting popular discontent over job losses, falling working class living standards and deep budget cuts in reactionary directions.

Her policies include barring foreign workers, accusing them of "stopping our children from winning apprenticeships and jobs." JLN also proposes banning Islamic headwear, blocking Chinese investment, arresting all suspected "terrorists" and restoring the death penalty.

Among her main proposals is for a return to compulsory national service. With youth unemployment officially at 12 percent, and 15.2 percent in Tasmania, Lambie claims that military training will give young people skills and work experience. But her policy is directed at preparing for war.

JLN wants to cut off government payments to all 18-year-olds who are not "earning, learning or serving." That is, they must either undertake basic military training, or be employed or studying, or have their welfare entitlements scrapped.

This policy serves multiple aims. One is to slash welfare spending, in order to help meet the demands of the corporate elite and financial institutions for austerity measures and lower taxes for companies and high-income recipients. Another is to push the young employed into low-paid work, thus helping drive down wages for all workers.

Above all, however, the purpose is to train and

indoctrinate working-class youth for war. According to Lambie: “It’s time to teach [our youth] some respect, loyalty and honour.”

In February, after dining with Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull at his official residence with other Senate “crossbenchers,” Lambie told reporters she was disappointed that the government’s Defence White Paper did not reintroduce conscription. “He launched a 10-year \$450 billion defence program and nowhere in that program did he or his government have room for the revival of a national service program for young people,” she said.

Lambie has repeatedly raised the spectre of China invading Australia. “If anybody thinks that we should have a national security and defence policy, which ignores the threat of a Chinese Communist invasion—you’re delusional and got rocks in your head,” she declared in August 2014.

This agitation is in line with the US military and strategic “pivot” to Asia to confront China and assert American global hegemony, with Australia on the frontline of this conflict.

Likewise, Lambie last year supported a chauvinist and protectionist campaign by the trade unions against the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement. She accused China of “push[ing] totalitarian ideologies” and being “anti-democratic” and “a bully, thief, liar and international human rights abuser.”

These views echo the accusations advanced by sections of the military, political and media establishment in the United States and Australia to justify preparing for war with China.

Lambie combines her militarist agenda with populist appeals and election promises aimed at exploiting widespread social discontent and disaffection. No one should give any credence to her pledges to oppose cutbacks to aged pensions, healthcare and penalty wage rates. Like other right-wing populist groups, she and her JLN have no solutions to the worsening social crisis and stand foursquare for the defence of Australian capitalism.

Formations such as Lambie’s have only been able to emerge and posture as defenders of working people as a result of the decades of betrayals carried out by the Labor Party and trade unions. The dramatic reversal of the living standards of workers began with the Hawke-Keating Labor governments of the 1980s and 1990s,

backed to the hilt by the unions under the Accord. The trade unions have collaborated with employers and governments, Labor and Liberal-National Coalition, in enforcing factory closures, eliminating jobs and hard-won conditions and undermining wages.

Lambie’s web site features an interview she conducted with New South Wales South Coast Labor Council secretary Arthur Rorris after he testified at a Senate committee inquiry into alleged Chinese “dumping” of steel. It is no accident that Lambie receives support from trade union leaders, as she draws from the same reactionary traditions of Laborism—nationalism, protectionism and militarism in the defence of Australian capitalism.

Along with Labor, the Coalition and the Greens, the myriad of “other” parties and self-styled independents, such as Lambie, represent no alternative for the working class since they all defend the profit system, which is the ultimate cause of war, exploitation and social inequality. We urge workers and young people to reject these formations and turn instead to the genuine socialist policies advanced by the SEP to completely reorganise economic life to meet human need, not the insatiable profit appetites of the wealthy elite.

To contact the SEP and get involved, visit our website or Facebook page.

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