

Australian election rally promotes Greens' bogus refugee "solution"

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A rally organised by the Refugee Action Coalition (RAC) at the Sydney Town Hall last Sunday again exposed the efforts by pseudo-left organisations to divert popular opposition to Canberra's persecution of refugees and asylum seekers behind the Greens.

With less than two weeks until the July 2 federal election, the meeting, billed as part of World Refugee Week, was a thinly-veiled election rally for the Greens and a promotion of a Labor-Greens coalition as a "lesser evil" to the Liberal-National government.

About 700 people, including representatives of the New South Wales Teachers' Federation and various pseudo-left groups, which dominate the RAC, attended. The meeting was chaired by RAC spokesman Ian Rintoul, a leading member of the state-capitalist Solidarity group.

Rintoul told the meeting that while the protest campaign would continue regardless of the election outcome, the rally was to ensure that everyone does "the right thing on July 2" in order to "see the end of the coalition government."

Greens senator Lee Rhiannon was the only politician to speak. Introducing her, Rintoul declared that the Greens "stand much closer" to the RAC "than anyone else." The RAC distributed a leaflet at the event listing which of the RAC's 10 refugee policies were held by the three major parliamentary parties. The Greens received eight "ticks," compared with two for the Labor Party and none for the Liberal-National coalition government.

The Greens accept the national framework of Australia's draconian and illegal anti-refugee policies. Rhiannon told the meeting that people arriving at the country's borders should have a "right to be processed" but that processing should be conducted in overseas countries before refugees came to Australia. In

other words, detention centres should be established in Indonesia or nearby states—another form of dumping refugees in impoverished countries.

While Rhiannon claimed that "people have every right to seek asylum here," the Greens have previously admitted that a quarter of all applicants for refugee status would be refused admission.

The Greens embrace the reactionary conceptions of "border protection"—i.e., that the state should regulate and enforce the movements of all refugees and immigrants. They have no opposition to mandatory detention and only call for a "time limit" with a "ceiling" of 50,000 for the "humanitarian intake." The "ceiling" would be enforced by blocking refugees arriving by boat. Ten thousand of the refugee admissions, would be reserved for those with "skills" deemed to be in "short supply."

Signalling the Greens' readiness to enter a coalition government with Labor, which backs the current refugee regime, Rhiannon claimed that there were "people" in both those parties "who had taken a stand." Labor leader Bill Shorten, she said, had "won the argument" to support the "turn back the boats" policy against caucus opponents who, she asserted, were simply "not loud enough."

Between 2010 and 2013, however, the Greens were parliamentary partners of Labor, propping up the minority government of Prime Minister Julia Gillard, which extended the Liberals' so-called "Pacific Solution" to include mandatory periods of offshore detention, even for officially recognised refugees.

Labor reopened the Manus Island and Nauru detention centres in 2012, after their closure in 2008. In 2013, the Rudd government legislated that refugees arriving by boat be deported and never permitted to return.

The lie that Labor can be pressured to provide a more “humane” policy on refugees was promoted throughout the rally. Rintoul claimed that there were 50 Labor candidates, as well as union members, who are “fighting to change” Labor’s policy. “We want to see [that figure] at 50 percent plus 1,” Rintoul declared.

Sophia Semmler from Young Labor for Refugee Rights was given the platform to reinforce this perspective. Semmler criticised Labor’s policy as “unforgiveable,” and “not far from the Liberals.” She insisted, however, that it was a “fallacy” that the party’s position was supported internally and said MPs who opposed it had been silenced. Semmler concluded by declaring that “it will be a Labor government” that ends the policy.

The sole criticism of the Greens came from Margaret Pomeranz, a film producer and television personality. Pomeranz attacked the Greens from the right for “naysaying” Gillard’s so-called “Malaysia solution” under which Australia would swap 800 asylum seekers held in detention centres for 4,000 refugees waiting in Malaysia for resettlement. The plan was declared illegal after three prominent refugee advocates took a case to Australia’s High Court.

Pomeranz maintained that this “solution” would have been preferable to “what is happening now.” Nobody expressed any opposition.

Other speakers provided graphic accounts of their experiences in the Kafkaesque nightmare that is the refugee incarceration system. Hamad, a young man admitted to Australia in 2014 under the “humanitarian” program spent three years in detention in Indonesia, where he saw several of his friends die.

“Stopping the boats” was “no solution,” he said, explaining that there were already nearly 5,000 refugees in detention in Indonesia, some for up to six years, and that Australia had only been prepared to accept 65.

Three teachers, Evan, Judith and Jennifer, who had taught in the detention centre on Nauru, spoke in defiance of the Border Force Act which provides up to two year’ jail for any “whistle blowers” exposing conditions in the camps.

They read letters from students, giving heart-rending accounts of the conditions they endure. These include bullying, violence, sexual abuse and rape, including against children. They described the “fading light” in

the eyes of their young charges. One 18-year-old girl, incarcerated since she was 15, said she had wanted to study engineering, but her mind was now “tired and empty, and doesn’t work.” Students wrote of their “bleak” lives, with “no future” and “nothing to look forward to.”

The rally voted for a “5-point plan,” presented as a “pledge for a just refugee policy.” Those in attendance were urged to ask their local election candidates—including MPs responsible for Canberra’s brutal refugee regime—to sign the pledge.

Socialist Equality Party members and supporters campaigned in opposition to these absurd appeals, distributing the party’s election program and explaining that the only way to end detention and persecution of asylum seekers was in the struggle to mobilise workers internationally on a socialist and internationalist program.

The SEP fights for the basic right of every person to live and work wherever they wish with full citizenship rights, which necessitates the complete abolition of the current “border protection” regime.

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

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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