

Socialist Alternative promotes Labor and the Greens as “lesser evil”

Peter Symonds
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With the Australian federal election looming on July 2, the pseudo-left organisation Socialist Alternative published a lengthy article on June 15 shamelessly encouraging, once again, a vote for the opposition Labor Party and the Greens, on the basis that they represent a lesser evil compared to the ruling Liberal-National Coalition.

While “lesser evilism” has long been Socialist Alternative’s stock-in-trade at election time, it takes on added political significance in conditions where the two-party system is crumbling amid widespread distrust and hostility to all the major parties. Socialist Alternative and other pseudo-left groups are responding to the deepest needs of the ruling class to confine the emerging opposition of workers and youth to parliamentary channels and prevent them turning to genuinely revolutionary socialist politics.

The possibility that neither the Coalition nor Labor will have an absolute majority in the House of Representatives or the Senate is raising deep concern in ruling circles about the next government’s ability to implement the bipartisan agenda of austerity and militarism. The past five years have already seen unprecedented political volatility, with five changes of prime minister, three of whom were removed via inner-party coups. The previous Labor government was the first minority administration since 1941 and only survived from 2010 to 2013 with the support of the Greens and so-called independents.

The Socialist Alternative article by Tom Bramble, entitled “Dump the Liberals, build a socialist movement,” has nothing to do with constructing a socialist movement. Rather it is a dishonest and fraudulent attempt to argue that “there is an almost endless list of reasons why we should welcome the defeat of the Coalition government” and thus encourage for a vote for Labor and the Greens.

“After nearly three years, there can hardly be a worker, a student or pensioner in the country who hasn’t been kicked in the guts by the Abbott-Turnbull government. The rich by contrast have been living high on the hog,” Bramble writes.

The widening gulf between rich and poor, however, did not begin from 2013 with the Coalition governments of Tony Abbott and Malcolm Turnbull but with the Hawke-Keating Labor governments between 1983 and 1996, which are still hailed in the establishment press as the benchmark for pro-

market “reform.” Subsequent Coalition and Labor governments took up where Prime Ministers Bob Hawke and Paul Keating left off.

It was the Greens-backed Labor government of Julia Gillard that laid the groundwork for Abbott and Turnbull to slash funding to public education, health care, universities and welfare and to herd refugees arriving by boat into squalid detention camps on Pacific Islands. Moreover, in 2014, Greens and Labor both voted for the Coalition budget appropriation bills that contained \$80 billion worth of cutbacks to the states, which fell most heavily on schools and hospitals.

Bramble declares: “A Coalition win on July 2 would give Turnbull’s economic ‘reform agenda’ a new lease of life by seeming to legitimate its neoliberal onslaught... Their defeat would send a strong signal that the working class will not cop these kind of attacks.” In fact, Labor leader Bill Shorten has already junked promises to oppose or reverse budget cuts worth an estimated \$33 billion over the next four years that will make deep inroads into welfare, health care, education, pensions and family payments.

Yet Bramble seeks to breathe life back into Labor’s decaying political corpse, declaring that it has “tacked to the left” and “not been afraid to use hostility to the rich to win support.” He even cites Turnbull’s criticism of Shorten as “the most left-wing, anti-business Labor leader we have seen in a generation.”

Socialist Alternative dredges the bottom of the bucket in its efforts to promote Labor’s election promises as a positive alternative to the Coalition. To take just a few examples of the lies and half-truths: Bramble hails Labor’s commitment to Gonski education funding, its opposition to \$100,000 university degrees and its defence of Medicare.

There is nothing progressive about the Gonski funding. The Gillard government introduced it not as the means for improving public schools but for implementing a far-reaching agenda of NAPLAN standardised testing, performance “reviews” for teachers and the closure and amalgamation of “non-performing” schools.

Again, it was the Gillard government that opened the way for \$100,000 degrees. The funding for the Gonski scheme came from a multi-billion dollar cut to university funding that has forced university administrations to press for a lifting of caps

on fees.

As for defending Medicare, just weeks ago, Shorten abandoned Labor's previous election promise to restore \$57 billion in funding to be stripped from public hospital funding over the next decade.

In 2012–13, the Gillard government reduced government spending by the greatest percentage since the 1930s Great Depression. Under conditions of a rapidly deteriorating Australian and global economy, a Shorten Labor government, which is committed to austerity, will make far-reaching inroads to the jobs and living standards of the working class.

The most damning indictment of the Greens, which Bramble declares have “positioned to the left of Labor,” is leader Richard Di Natale's declared willingness to go into a coalition with Labor after the election. In the name of ensuring “stability,” the Greens, for all their posturing as socially progressive, are ready to form government and implement Labor's reactionary agenda of war and austerity—as they did under Gillard.

On the accelerating US “pivot to Asia” and preparations for war against China, Bramble makes the barest of references, declaring that Labor has endorsed “the White House's attempts to maintain its domination of the Asia Pacific in the face of China's emergence as a regional power.” He refers to the danger of a US-China military clash that would involve Australian military bases, but condemns neither the US or Labor. No mention is made of Labor defence spokesman Stephen Conroy's declaration that a Shorten government would provocatively send Australian military aircraft and warships to challenge Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea.

Socialist Alternative, which notoriously declared that “knee-jerk anti-imperialism” was a thing of the past, has increasingly lined up with US imperialism's wars and provocations. It has consistently backed Washington's right-wing proxies in Syria in the US-led regime-change operation against President Bashar al-Assad. Insofar as Socialist Alternative has written about the US “pivot” against China at all, it has given credence to American propaganda that it is Chinese “expansionism” and “imperialism,” not US provocations, that are generating tensions in Asia.

Socialist Alternative makes limited formal criticisms of the Greens and Labor. However, the pseudo-left organisation actively collaborates with trade union bureaucrats from both parties in suppressing any independent struggle by workers. Along with other pseudo-left groups, it has helped provide protest platforms, particularly for the Greens, to fraudulently posture as progressive, on a range of issues, from refugees to university cuts.

While Bramble declares that the Greens pitch themselves as a party of the “usually quite well-heeled middle class,” it is precisely this well-off layer that the pseudo-lefts represent. Socialist Alternative is one of the chief proponents of identity politics that elevate issues of gender, race and sexual

orientation above the fundamental social division of class, and has become a tool of advancement in politics, academia, the media, state apparatus and business.

Socialist Alternative criticises the Greens as “middle class” only because the party has failed to unconditionally support Labor. “Orienting to the middle class, the Greens don't see the issue of Labor versus Coalition as a reflection of the broader class divide,” Bramble declares. However, in their policies and program, Labor and the Coalition are both parties of big business. Bramble's criticism of the Greens reflects the line of the various Labor-aligned union bureaucracies with which Socialist Alternative collaborates closely.

The most telling aspect of Bramble's article is in the final two paragraphs where he declares that the “task ahead of us is to build the anti-capitalist alternative, a radical socialist movement committed to overturning the rule of the 1 percent.” Socialist Alternative does not speak for the vast majority of the population, but for the affluent top 10 percent of the population who aspire to a beneficial redistribution of some of the top 1 percent's wealth and certainly do not want to overthrow the social order on which their comfortable lifestyles rest.

Socialist Alternative has already made absolutely clear that by “anti-capitalist alternative” it means emulating Syriza in Greece, which last year carried out a gross betrayal of the mass anti-austerity movement of workers and youth. Within months of coming to office, which Socialist Alternative hailed as “a stunning victory,” Syriza defied the outcome of a referendum rejecting austerity and imposed the entire agenda being demanded by the EU and European banks.

Bramble now promotes the Labour Party's Jeremy Corbyn in Britain or the Democrats' Bernie Sanders in the US, whose program, he claims, “aims to tackle the power and privileges of the rich.” Nothing could be further from the truth. Corbyn and Sanders are both capitalist politicians who use left-sounding phrase-mongering to try to block any break with the parties of the official establishment. That is precisely what Socialist Alternative is seeking to do through its promotion of Labor and the Greens as the “lesser evil” in the Australian election.

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Authorised by James Cogan, Shop 6, 212 South Terrace, Bankstown Plaza, Bankstown, NSW 2200.



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