

Glen Lazarus Team promotes nationalism and xenophobia

Erin Cooke—SEP Senate candidate for Queensland
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Record numbers of “independent” and “fourth party” candidates appear on Senate ballot papers for the July 2 election. Across the country, 631 people are running for 76 Senate seats, hoping to capitalise on the widespread disenchantment with the main establishment parties—Labor, Liberal-National and Greens.

Just like mining magnate Clive Palmer’s now disgraced Palmer United Party (PUP) that sprang up before the 2013 election, these groupings serve to channel the popular hostility back into the parliamentary framework of capitalist politics. Almost without exception, they are pushing nationalist and protectionist policies that pit workers in Australia against their fellow workers in Asia and internationally.

Among them is Glenn Lazarus, a former PUP senator who announced in May the formation of yet another new party, the Glenn Lazarus Team. Like the Jacqui Lambie Network, established by another ex-PUP senator, and the Nick Xenophon Team, Lazarus’s grouping is a right-wing, nationalist and populist party.

Lazarus, who is standing for re-election to the Senate in Queensland, was the PUP’s Senate leader for a period. He has suggested no political differences with Palmer, except to try to distance himself from Palmer’s closure of the Queensland Nickel refinery in Townsville this year, at the cost of nearly 800 jobs directly and up to 3,000 more via flow-on effects.

In 2013, by posturing as an opponent of the major parties, PUP, through its well-funded campaign, won 5 percent of the national vote and 11 percent in Palmer’s home state of Queensland. It soon became more obvious, however, that Palmer’s agenda consisted of slashing corporate taxes and sponsoring other pro-business “free market” policies, all on the pretence of fostering economic growth that would somehow “trickle down” to benefit social services.

In the current election campaign, Lazarus is engaged in a similar hoax, combined with scapegoating of foreigners and immigrants for rising unemployment, falling living standards and deteriorating public services.

Responding to Prime Minister Turnbull’s plea last weekend for voters not to support independents and small parties, Lazarus declared: “Malcolm Turnbull and his government clearly want unfettered power in both houses of parliament to sell off of our land to foreign buyers, give away more of our jobs to overseas workers, increase GST to 15 percent, sell off Medicare, deregulate uni fees and cut the pension.”

Nationalism and xenophobia are constant themes in Lazarus’s remarks. He blames all of the current economic and social woes on foreign governments, corporations or workers. Lazarus calls for fewer visas for overseas workers and declares that “foreign countries and companies are circling our farmers like hawks.”

At the same time, Lazarus remains an unabashed supporter of big business. During April, when Turnbull conducted a trade mission to China, Lazarus called on the prime minister to emphasise that “while Australia is open for business, Australian land is not for sale to foreign buyers.”

Likewise, Lazarus has backed the planned spending of \$495 billion over the coming decade on the military, provided only that submarines, ships and other weaponry are manufactured in Australia, supposedly to create local jobs.

On his web site, Lazarus promotes militarism. “Military service is one of the highest forms of commitment to our country,” he declares. “Our defence policy must ensure our country is equipped to protect our borders and maintain regional stability.”

Conscious of underlying popular opposition to war, however, Lazarus is silent on the purpose of the military buildup—to participate in escalating US-led provocations and wars, particularly against China. Lazarus calls for a parliamentary vote on “Australia’s involvement in war,” in an attempt to lend political legitimacy to any such conflict. In reality, in the event of a US-China war, Australia would automatically be involved because of its hosting of key American military facilities and close integration into the US armed forces.

Lazarus’s chauvinist attitudes were illustrated in May when he tweeted and uploaded to Facebook a comment denigrating the refugees being detained indefinitely in intolerable conditions in Australia’s offshore camps on Nauru and Manus Island. “Why are asylum seekers on Manus Island being treated like kings and being given free cigarettes and other perks?” he asked.

The comment led to a backlash on Twitter, where the overwhelming majority of responses supported the refugees and were hostile to Lazarus’s demonisation of them. On Facebook, the responses were divided between those opposing such reactionary comments and those backing Lazarus, mostly voicing views of a far-right and racist character. The furore led to the post being deleted.

In line with their own promotion of nationalism and protectionism, various trade unions have backed Lazarus’s re-election. The Queensland Council of Unions held a barbecue in support of Lazarus, while the Maritime Union of Australia has provided cash and assistance with handing out his how-to-vote cards.

Protectionism does not defend jobs. Rather it subordinates workers to less competitive sections of industry and divides them from their only genuine ally—the working class around the world.

To justify their support for Lazarus, the unions point to his opposition to the government’s proposed Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC), which would have the power to interrogate and prosecute workers involved in industrial action.

Lazarus’s claim to defend the legal rights of workers is a sham. In the first place, like the unions, as well as Labor and the Greens, Lazarus backs the “Fair Work” laws introduced by the previous Labor government as a more reliable means of suppressing strikes and stoppages outside of union-authorized enterprise

bargaining campaigns.

As a PUP senator, Lazarus also vehemently backed the bipartisan, Coalition-Labor, assault on basic legal and democratic rights under the guise of combating terrorism. In October 2014, for example, Lazarus spoke in the Senate in favour of “anti-terror” laws, calling for prison sentences for publicly identifying an intelligence operative be lengthened to 10 years. The government accepted his proposal.

This expansion of the powers of the police and spy apparatus is aimed at suppressing social unrest and political discontent. As a result of Lazarus’s amendment, any worker or political activist who exposes an undercover agent in their midst could be jailed for a decade.

The Socialist Equality Party urges workers and young people not to be fooled by the Glenn Lazarus Team and similar parties and formations. Above all, they defend the capitalist profit system, which is the root cause of war, social inequality and exploitation. Instead, we appeal to all those youth and workers looking for a way forward to support and join the SEP, the only party that represents a socialist alternative, based on the fight to unify the working class globally in order to overturn the financial and corporate oligarchy.

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

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