

The political issues posed by the Australian election crisis

Socialist Equality Party (Australia)
6 July 2016

The uncertain result of the July 2 Australian election, with no party or group of parties yet in a position to form government, is the outcome of a profound crisis of the traditional forms of capitalist rule that prevails in country after country around the world.

In unprecedented numbers, Australian voters rejected the major capitalist parties—the Liberal-National Coalition and the Australian Labor Party—and incessant calls in the media for the election of a “stable, majority government.”

A profound disconnect exists between the political establishment, which serves only the interests of a financial and corporate elite, and the majority of the population, whose primary concerns are stagnant or falling wages, insecure employment, deteriorating services and the bleak future facing the younger generation. The lives of ordinary working people are dominated by instability and insecurity, as austerity measures imposed by Labor and Coalition governments since the onset of the global slump in 2008 compound decades of declining living standards.

For six years, Labor and the Coalition have resorted to anti-democratic conspiracies and shameless lies and populism to try to overcome their inability to win popular support for an agenda dictated by imperialist interests and the major banks and corporations.

In 2010, in order to swing Australian foreign policy behind the US military build-up against China, the Labor Party ousted Kevin Rudd as prime minister through an overnight factional coup and installed Julia Gillard, behind the backs of the population. Just months later, Labor suffered a debacle in the 2010 election and was forced to form the first minority government since 1941, relying, above all, on the support of the Greens to push through militarist and austerity policies.

As popular discontent continued to grow, Rudd replaced Gillard in another anti-democratic conspiracy on the eve of the 2013 election. The Coalition under Tony Abbott came to office in a landslide victory by whipping up anti-refugee hysteria and covering up its anti-working class agenda, while Labor suffered its lowest vote in 110 years. Within two

years, however, facing a parliamentary impasse over attempts to ram through deeply unpopular austerity measures, Abbott himself was ousted last September in yet another backroom coup, this time by current prime minister, former investment banker and multi-millionaire, Malcolm Turnbull.

Now, Turnbull’s deluded belief that he could win a working majority in both houses of parliament, on the basis of fraudulent claims of bringing “jobs and growth” and “exciting times,” has suffered a shipwreck on the rocks of mass alienation and hostility toward the two-party system.

If Turnbull loses office or is ousted by his own party, the position of prime minister will have changed hands six times in just six years. To underscore the magnitude of the current political volatility, it is only necessary to recall that in the 32 years between 1975 and 2007, Australia had just four prime ministers.

The crisis of the Australian establishment parties and parliamentary mechanisms, under the impact of ever-widening social inequality and growing class antagonisms, is paralleled around the world. Across Europe, longstanding political formations have collapsed or are in the process of collapsing. The European Union itself is disintegrating following the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom, where the centuries-old Tory Party may not survive the political upheavals that threaten to tear the country apart.

In the United States, the Republican Party is wracked by divisions and potential splits in the face of the success of fascistic demagogue Donald Trump in the presidential primaries. The Democratic Party is no less in disarray, after facing a rebellion against the party establishment in the form of the support of millions of workers and youth for the campaign of Bernie Sanders, in the mistaken belief that he represented socialism.

The ruling elites, whether in Australia or around the world, cannot return to the stable and predictable parliamentary forms through which they ruled in the past. The systemic breakdown of world economy, ever mounting geopolitical conflicts, the rising danger of war, and, above all, the

political radicalisation underway within the working class and youth, preclude that possibility. The suggestion of some commentators that another Australian election be immediately called, would only produce the same, or an even more unpredictable result.

Australian billionaire Gerry Harvey's declaration on Monday that the "only cure we've got is to have a dictator," reflects intense frustration within ruling circles that they cannot achieve their political, economic and military agendas through democratic means. They can only defend their obscene levels of wealth and the profit system itself, as it devastates the lives of workers and threatens to drag humanity into world war, through authoritarian forms of rule and the ruthless suppression of opposition.

The working class must take a sharp warning from the emergence in Australia of the same nationalist and even fascist tendencies that have developed elsewhere. The Xenophon Team, which advocates economic protectionism and trade war, won a large vote in the devastated industrial state of South Australia. A range of right-wing Christian parties and a "law-and-order" candidate attracted significant votes. Pauline Hanson's One Nation, which seeks to divert social discontent over unemployment and poverty into anti-immigrant and particularly anti-Muslim xenophobia, gained sufficient support to once again win seats in the Senate.

Political responsibility for the ability of right-wing demagogues to make appeals to disaffected workers and youth lies with the Labor Party and the trade unions, which have for decades suppressed any struggle by workers in defence of jobs, wages and living conditions. Moreover, the promotion of the bogus "war on terror" by the entire political and media establishment has enabled formations like One Nation to peddle their anti-Islamic filth.

Pseudo-left organisations such as Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative have played a particularly pernicious role by promoting the Labor Party and the Greens as a "lesser evil" and thus acting as a barrier to the independent mobilisation of the working class, on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program, against the entire official establishment.

The 2016 Australian election reveals the existence of an unprecedented political vacuum. Longstanding loyalties have broken down and masses of people are looking for alternatives. This situation will only become more polarised and explosive. The next Australian government will have to attempt, under condition of worsening global slump and domestic recession, to protect the Australian financial and corporate elite through intensified budget austerity cuts and attacks on workers' jobs, wages and conditions. It is inevitable that class conflict will erupt.

Moreover, the commitment of Australian imperialism to its

strategic alliance with the United States, and the escalating preparations for a military confrontation with China, particularly in the South China Sea, will provoke intense anti-war opposition.

It is in this context that the objective significance of the election campaign conducted by the Socialist Equality Party, the Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), can be fully appreciated.

At the very centre of the SEP's campaign was the fight to cut through the conspiracy of silence, by the entire Australian establishment, on the threat of war and to promote the call by the ICFI for the building of a unified international anti-war movement to prevent the catastrophe of World War III.

The SEP advanced the internationalist and socialist alternative to the failure of world capitalism and the nation-state system: the fight for workers' governments in every country, which will bring the immense productive capacity that exists under the democratic control of the working class and the oppressed, and reorganise economic and social life in the interests of the vast majority of humanity, not the privileged few.

The SEP's principled campaign for the development of an international anti-war movement on the basis of a socialist program has laid down a marker that will, in the coming period, register in the political consciousness of the most advanced and thoughtful sections of the working class and youth, in Australia and around the world. We look forward with confidence to building a mass international and revolutionary movement of the working class, in collaboration with all the sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact