

# Australian prime minister calls crisis election for May 18

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With his faction-racked government beset by deepening economic and political crises, Prime Minister Scott Morrison today set May 18 as the date for an Australian federal election.

Even the extraordinary timing of Morrison's announcement was revealing. It is an anxious bid to shut down parliament immediately and go to the polls as quickly as possible before the economic situation worsens and further rifts erupt in the ruling Liberal-National Coalition.

Morrison went to government house at 7am to ask the governor-general to not just dissolve parliament, as usual for an election, but to prorogue it. Governor-General Sir Peter Cosgrove prorogued—that is, suspended—the Senate as of 8.29 am, exercising his power to do so under section 5 of the Constitution.

Senate estimates hearings scheduled for today and tomorrow were immediately cancelled. This ends any further, even limited, parliamentary scrutiny of last week's budget and its fraudulent economic predictions, on which both the government and the opposition Labor Party have based all their election pledges.

At an 8am media conference, Morrison declared that the election was a “clear choice” between the Coalition and Labor as to whom voters should “trust” to build a “strong Australia.”

In reality, the established parliamentary parties offer the working class—the vast majority of the population—no choice. This includes the Greens and an array of right-wing populists and “independents.” All support the existing capitalist profit system and its agenda of austerity and militarism.

Far from “trust,” there is seething hostility toward the political establishment elite after decades in which successive Coalition and Labor-led governments have enforced ever-widening social inequality, falling wages

and conditions, deteriorating public services, and participated in US-led wars.

The Socialist Equality Party will stand candidates in the election to oppose this entire agenda. The SEP will be the only party to expose the lies of the political establishment and the corporate media, and tell the truth: the only way forward for the working class lies in unifying its struggles globally to abolish the capitalist profit system and establish workers' governments to carry out a socialist program.

Such is the fraud of the official election campaign that both the old ruling parties have adopted the phony catch cry of a “fair go” as their central theme. Morrison told the media conference he believed “in a fair go for those who have a go,” insisting that this could be achieved only through individual “hard work.”

Acutely aware of rising working-class unrest, Labor Party leader Bill Shorten issued a video in which he again declared that his party stood for “a fair go for Australia.” He repeated the bogus claims he made in last week's budget reply speech that a Labor government would make Australia less unequal.

These unabashed lies by both parties were further exposed just before Morrison called the election. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) effectively demolished all the economic forecasts in last week's budget. It issued a sharp downgrade for global growth predictions, and said Australia's economy was slowing twice as fast as comparable countries.

On top of the international downturn and trade war tensions ignited by the US, the IMF said an “unexpectedly” rapid and large fall in house prices in Australia meant the country's economy was in “a delicate situation.” The IMF's representative Thomas Helbling told the *Australian Financial Review*: “That's always a big concern in a budget.”

The IMF's blunt assessment is another warning that whichever party forms the next government, it will rapidly abandon its election vows of "fairness" and deepen the brutal austerity drive.

The IMF slashed its 2019 growth estimate for Australia from 2.8 percent to 2.1 percent, far below the budget's unreal forecasts of 2.75 percent in 2019? 20 and 2020? 21, and 3 percent in the following two years. That alone means cutting billions of dollars from social spending in order to meet the demands of the financial markets for a budget surplus.

As for "fairness," the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) issued a report that exposed this fraud. It stated that Australia's richest individuals are increasing their proportion of national income to some of the highest levels in the developed world, while "middle-class Australians" are being squeezed into lower incomes or absolute poverty at some of the fastest rates internationally.

By "middle class," the OECD means most of the working class—those households earning between \$US19,537 and \$US52,097 a year in purchasing power parity dollars. While upper income Australians, as a proportion of the population, grew by 2 percentage points between the mid-1980s and the mid-2010s, their share of income grew by 7 percentage points.

Median incomes in Australia had doubled since the mid-1990s, but housing costs had lifted by 250 percent, education expenses had increased by 150 percent, and "over-indebtedness" had soared, placing households in what "looks increasingly like a boat in rocky waters."

Between 2007 and 2015, the OECD found the share of "middle-income households" falling into poverty in a single year was 4 percent, double the rate of the developed world and the same rate as impoverished Greece.

These statistics provide only a pale picture of the inequality and falling living conditions imposed by the corporate ruling class and its political servants, both Coalition and Labor, over the past four decades. Since the global financial breakdown of 2008-09, this social assault has only intensified, with full-time jobs being casualised, young workers being pushed into low-paid and insecure work, and more than a million jobless and disabled workers forced to try to survive on sub-poverty welfare payments.

In office since the Labor Party suffered a landslide

defeat in 2013, the Coalition between the Liberals and the rural-based Nationals is being torn apart. The most right-wing factions, around Morrison, Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton and ex-Prime Minister Tony Abbott, are seeking to divert rising social discontent and political disaffection in xenophobic and nationalist directions.

Given the government's instability, sections of big business are again looking to the Labor Party, backed by the trade unions, to take office to suppress the resistance of the working class, as the Hawke and Keating governments did from 1983 to 1996 and the Rudd and Gillard governments from 2007 to 2013.



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