

Australian poll warns of plunging support for major parties

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The Murdoch media's *Australian* ran a somewhat alarmed headline on Monday: "Newspoll: More voters turning towards the fringes."

The article reported that the newspaper's latest Newspoll had found that the proportion of electors intending to vote for what it labelled "fringe parties" and independents had reached 13 percent—"its highest level in at least four years."

This result sheds further light on why the Liberal-National Coalition government and the Labor Party opposition jointly rushed through Australia's parliament new electoral laws designed to de-register most parties not currently represented in parliament.

These "non-parliamentary" parties, including the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), have been given only until December 2 to submit the details of 1,500 members—tripling the previous requirement—or be barred from having their party names alongside those of their candidates on ballot papers. That would prevent voters from knowing the political identities and programs of the candidates they are considering voting for.

These laws, suddenly unveiled behind the backs of the population, accompanied by a virtual corporate media blackout, are a naked bid to stifle dissent and shore up the political establishment.

Carefully orchestrated media opinion polls, with questions that only offer choices within the official political framework, provide only a distorted picture of the widespread discontent.

Nevertheless, the Newspoll results are revealing. They show that intended voting support for "others," excluding Labor, the Coalition, the Greens and Pauline Hanson's far-right One Nation, has risen quickly by five percentage points since August.

This level is almost double that "others" received in

April last year, during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, when their support was at 6 percent and the media claimed that governments would bring the disaster under control within months, or at least before Christmas.

The latest survey was conducted amid a worsening crisis, with new infections surging above 2,000 a day, even as governments accelerate the lifting of safety restrictions and are about to reopen schools. Significantly, the polling also came just after the announcement of the AUKUS alliance—a US-UK-Australia pact for war against China.

Other polls, conducted by the Lowy Institute and Australia Institute, show high levels of opposition—almost two-thirds—to joining a US-led war against China, even in a suggested scenario of China incorporating Taiwan. This result is despite an escalating anti-China campaign by the political and media establishment.

With both the Coalition and Labor sitting on lows of only 37 percent each, the prospect is looming of another "hung" parliament and unstable minority government, with the next federal election due by May.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison's net approval rating has plunged to minus one, a 21-point fall from May, when his media-inflated approval rating was at 58 percent and his disapproval was at 38 percent.

But Labor has been unable to capitalise on the mounting opposition to Morrison's Coalition government and its New South Wales state counterpart, which has spearheaded the big business reopening drive.

Labor's primary vote has dropped three points in the past five weeks, from a brief high of 40 percent in late August. That is a reflection of Labor's bipartisan backing for both the scrapping of pandemic safety

measures and the AUKUS pact.

Moreover, Hanson's One Nation formation, which seeks to channel the discontent in nationalist and anti-immigrant directions, has dropped to an equal post-2019 federal election low of 2 percent.

The *Australian* gave no explanation for the sharp shift in the polling, except to speculate that the re-emergence of billionaire Clive Palmer's United Australia Party had produced "a deepening split in the conservative vote."

Palmer's group is vying with several other right-wing formations to propagate anti-lockdown and anti-vaccine demagoguery, feeding into the corporate demand that governments must coerce the population into "living with the virus," regardless of the costs in human health and lives.

Of far greater concern in ruling circles is the danger that the deepening political disconnect will move in the direction of socialism, as the only answer to the homicidal policies of the capitalist class. That is why the electoral laws also hand the election authorities the power to deregister parties that have "socialist" in their name, as well as "labor," "liberal" and "green," if a previously registered party has claimed that label.

The alienation of the population from the major capitalist parties is accelerating and workers' struggles are growing despite being suppressed for years by the trade unions. That is because of a decades-long assault on the jobs, wages and living standards of the working class, and the concentration of obscene levels of wealth in the hands of a tiny minority. This hostility has been intensified by the pandemic, and is being compounded by the rising war danger.

During the post-World War II period, Australia was regarded as politically stable. At the 1949 election, the Coalition and Labor parties obtained more than 96 percent of the vote. By 2019, the combined Senate vote for the Coalition, Labor and the Greens—now the "third party" of the parliamentary order—had dropped to 76 percent.

It is now six years since the BBC dubbed Australia the "coup capital of the democratic world" in 2015. In 2007, the Coalition's John Howard had become the first prime minister in eight decades to lose his own parliamentary seat in a landslide defeat. Since then, governments and leaders, both federal and state, have fallen in rapid succession, either by election defeats or

sordid backroom plots.

After Howard came Labor's Kevin Rudd, Julia Gillard and Rudd again, followed by the Coalition's Tony Abbott, Malcolm Turnbull and Morrison—seven replacements in a decade. Gillard presided over the first minority government since World War II, propped up by the Greens, and no government since has proven any more stable.

As governments intensify the drive to ram through the corporate agenda, the political ferment must be transformed into the building of an independent political movement of the working class on the basis of a socialist program that addresses the root cause of the pandemic catastrophe, widening social inequality and the drive to war—the capitalist profit system itself.

The only party that fights for this program is the Socialist Equality Party. The SEP is demanding the repeal of the anti-democratic electoral laws and the removal of all restrictions on the right of parties and individuals to run in elections.

At the same time, the SEP is appealing to all supporters and readers to become electoral members of the SEP, and urge others to do the same. Help us recruit the extra 1,000 electoral members that we need to retain our party registration and take forward the fight for the essential socialist alternative.



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