

Australian Labor government adopts Trump-style attacks on immigrants

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The Australian Labor government pushed three bills through federal parliament yesterday which provide for mass roundups, widespread deportations, including to countries where immigrants face persecution and other sweeping attacks on the democratic rights of the most vulnerable sections of the working class.

The immigration bills were among 31 pieces of legislation rushed through the Senate on the last sitting day of parliament for the year. The frenzied legislative session, involving the curtailment and even suspension of debate, underscored the anti-democratic character of the whole parliamentary set-up. Far-reaching measures were rushed through, without even the usual threadbare pretense of scrutiny.

Not one of the legislative measures will substantially improve the living or social conditions of the population. Instead, the major bills centre on repression, including a world-first ban on under-16-year-olds accessing social media, which will dramatically increase internet censorship. Others allow for massive handouts to the corporate elite, including the property developers responsible for the housing crisis.

Even in that reactionary context, the immigration legislation stands out. For years, Australian governments, Labor and Liberal-National alike, have set global precedents for the persecution of refugees and immigrants, including through the indefinite detention of asylum-seekers in offshore sites that amount to concentration camps.

Now, a Labor government is going even further, adopting policies of domestic repression that are in their substance no different to the measures associated with US President-elect Donald Trump and other fascist forces in Europe and internationally.

The main migration amendment bill would more accurately be described as a mass deportation bill. Immigration officials have admitted that more than 80,000 people could be expelled from the country under the legislation. That includes more than 75,000 who allegedly do not have a valid visa, as well as those on various bridging visas.

The mechanism for the mass deportation is entirely lawless. The government will pay unnamed third countries to take possession of the expelled immigrants in a policy that amounts to state human trafficking. Those countries do not have to be

the signatories to the International Refugee Convention, which stipulates basic protections for immigrants and asylum-seekers.

In the clearest indication of the homicidal intent of the program, the legislation completely indemnifies the government from any consequences of the deportations. That is essentially an admission that the expulsions will result in calamities, including indefinite detention, injury and even death.

Australia's visa regime is notoriously draconian and is well known to be discriminatory, with citizens from impoverished and developing countries frequently barred entry. Those who manage to arrive, including refugees, are frequently placed on temporary bridging visas, some of which impose onerous restrictions on employment and bar access to welfare, public healthcare and other essentials. This cohort is faced with complete uncertainty as to their future.

It is entirely possible to violate the onerous and bureaucratic visa requirements through no fault of one's own.

In the US, Trump has pledged to immediately deport millions of migrants upon coming to office in January. He has made clear that this will involve the mobilisation of repressive state forces, including the military, in a program that will inevitably involve attacks on the civil liberties of broad sections of the working class, whatever their immigration status.

Labor's plan for mass deportations will be no different. In a country of 25 million people, the 80,000 immigrants to be immediately targeted constitute a not insignificant proportion of the population.

Australia, like the US, moreover, is a country of immigrants. An estimated 8.2 million Australian residents, or almost a third of the population were born overseas. At least 48 percent of the population has one or more parents who were born overseas.

The scale of the deportations being prepared, and the country's demographic makeup, sets the stage for widespread raids and Gestapo-style demands for proof of immigration status. The authoritarian character of the bill is underscored by its expansion of ministerial power, including to effectively overturn the judgements of tribunals providing asylum protection to non-citizens, paving the way for onerous conditions to be imposed on them, up to detention or potential deportation.

The second bill, which complements the first, mandates that migrants being expelled from the country “cooperate in efforts to ensure their prompt and lawful removal,” or they could be imprisoned for up to a year.

Again, underscoring the fascistic pedigree of the legislation, that bill provides the government with powers to cancel all new visa applications from designated countries that do not accept migrants removed from Australia. The clear inspiration for the measure, which will undoubtedly target both impoverished countries and those in the crosshairs of US and allied imperialism, is the travel ban implemented by the first Trump administration targeting Muslim-majority nations.

The final bill provides the state with the power to confiscate mobile phones from refugees and immigrants in detention. The legislation is virtually identical to bills that Labor opposed while in opposition. Its transparent purpose is to prevent vulnerable detainees from communicating with the outside world, including to report instances of abuse and persecution.

The new legislation is the culmination of a stepped-up campaign over the past year, vilifying refugees and immigrants.

That has included a frenzied campaign against a small cohort of refugees, who were freed after the High Court ruled last year that their indefinite detention was unlawful. The individuals, some of whom were previously convicted of crimes and served their sentences, have been subjected to a relentless vilification from the media, as well as the government, which has repeatedly joined with the Liberal-National Coalition to impose punishing restrictions including the forced wearing of ankle bracelets.

Government leaders, including Immigration Minister Tony Burke have railed against “criminal” refugees, declaring “we don’t want them here” in Trumpian terms. At the same time, Labor and the Coalition have scapegoated immigrants for the worsening social crisis, including record housing unaffordability, which has in fact been produced by a speculative bubble benefiting the property developers and the ultra-wealthy.

Labor’s role in the latest attack is not accidental. Anti-immigrant xenophobia is in the DNA of this party, which was explicitly founded on the racist White Australia policy of excluding non-European migrants from the country. In recent decades, Labor has spearheaded attacks on asylum, including through the introduction of mandatory detention for refugees who arrive in Australia “unlawfully” in the 1990s, and the reopening of offshore detention camps in 2012.

The program of the Australian Labor government is strikingly similar to that of the British Labour government. Both are enforcing deportations and scapegoating migrants while ruling for the rich. While the British Labour administration is ending heating subsidies for pensioners in the winter, the Australian Labor government has presided over the biggest reversal in working class living standards in decades, with recent figures showing an average decline in purchasing power of nine

percent over the past three years.

Both are participating in the US-Israeli genocide of Palestinians in Gaza, the NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and the preparations for a catastrophic war with China, including through their AUKUS pact with the US that is a cockpit of war preparations and of the militarisation of the Indo-Pacific.

The open adoption of far-right policies by the old social-democratic parties, which decades ago severed any connection to the working class and have become unalloyed instruments of finance capital, recalls Lenin’s characterisation of imperialism and all of its agencies as “reaction all down the line.” Under conditions of a breakdown of global capitalism, imperialist governments, whatever their nominal political colouration, are dispensing with the trappings of democracy, and turning to a program of authoritarianism, to repress mass social opposition and to enforce the policy of war.

That underscores the fact that the real and growing danger of fascism cannot be fought within the framework of official capitalist politics, or under the auspices of its representatives. In revealing comments, leaders of the increasingly far-right Australian opposition Liberal-National Coalition have boasted that they are already setting immigration policy.

As the Socialist Equality Parties have insisted, the fight against the danger of fascism requires an independent political movement of the working class, based on the perspective of ending the capitalist system that is the source of the deepening barbarism and beginning the socialist transformation of society. In opposition to the nationalism and xenophobia of the ruling elite, that means a fight for the international unity of working people everywhere.



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