

# Liberal and Labor compete in stoking anti-refugee scare-mongering

Mike Head: SEP candidate for Oxley  
1 May 2019

In a bid to deflect attention from his government's regressive social policies, Prime Minister Scott Morrison has sought to stoke anti-immigrant prejudice and place it at the centre of the May 18 federal election campaign.

Addressing a stage-managed rally of the Liberal Party faithful on Sunday, Morrison blamed asylum seekers, together with immigrant workers, for "congestion" in Australia's major cities and announced a freeze on the small annual intake of 18,750 refugees.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) urges workers and youth to reject this political poison. Governments, not refugees and immigrants, are to blame for the decaying public schools, hospitals and social services, for the falling real wages, mass unemployment and under-employment and casualised working conditions!

With the Labor Party equally culpable for this social crisis, its leader Bill Shorten tried to outbid Morrison. Shorten claimed that "the real congestion" was caused by 1.6 million people who are in Australia on temporary work visas.

When it comes to demonising immigrants, refugees and foreign workers, there is no real difference between these two parties. Morrison's Liberal-National Coalition is vying with Labor to confuse and divide the seething working class discontent by whipping up putrid anti-immigrant chauvinism.

Like the other electorates in which the SEP is standing candidates, Oxley, in Brisbane's impoverished western suburbs, reflects the international character of the working class. The population is extremely diverse, with immigrants and refugees from many parts of the world, including Vietnam, China, South Asia, Latin America and Africa.

The SEP is the only party that unconditionally

defends immigrants and refugees.

Our election statement explains: "The SEP opposes all forms of racism and nationalism, which pit worker against worker and scapegoat the most vulnerable layers of the working class—particularly immigrants and refugees—for the social crisis created by capitalism. We unconditionally defend the basic democratic right of refugees and immigrants to live, study and work in Australia, or anywhere in the world, with full citizenship rights."

Confronted by rising working class struggles on every continent, the ruling elites everywhere are resorting to anti-foreigner scare-mongering to try to split workers, while militarising their borders and shutting out refugees.

The April 15 atrocity in New Zealand, in which an Australian-born fascist gunned down 50 innocent Muslims, demonstrated the poisonous logic of this politics. As his on-line manifesto revealed, Brenton Tarrant's mass murder was directly inspired by the xenophobic, anti-immigrant climate created by the political establishment in Australia, as well as in Europe and the US.

Successive Australian governments, both Labor and Coalition, have led the world for decades in the assault on asylum seekers. It was Labor, backed by the trade unions, that initiated the anti-refugee regime in 1991. In keeping with the party's racist "White Australia" heritage, it introduced the world's first system of "mandatory detention"—the indefinite incarceration of all refugees.

This toxic political atmosphere has spawned blatantly racist and anti-immigrant formations such as Senator Pauline Hanson's One Nation and Senator Fraser Anning's Conservative National Party, which demands a return to the "White Australia" policy.

The Christchurch massacre shocked working people internationally. Initially, capitalist politicians hypocritically expressed sympathy for the victims. But it has not taken long for the offensive to resume.

On Sunday, Morrison boasted of his record as a former immigration minister, in heading “Operation Sovereign Borders,” a military offensive to repel all refugee boats. These are people fleeing the predatory wars conducted by the US and its allies, including Australia, in the Middle East, or the destitution inflicted on their home countries by global capitalism.

Morrison invited ex-Prime Minister John Howard onto his rally stage, and reprised Howard’s infamous 2001 anti-refugee election slogan: “We decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come.”

But Labor at the time, then led by Kim Beazley, lined up totally behind the Coalition government in slandering refugees—falsely accusing them of throwing their children into the sea. It backed the removal of asylum seekers to remote Pacific island prison camps.

And the next Labor government, kept in office by the Greens, reopened the Pacific prisons in 2012, declaring that none of the detainees would ever be permitted to enter Australia. Some of Labor’s victims still languish in the camps to this day.

Today the Greens are anxiously seeking to again become de facto coalition partners in a Labor-led government. They are equally dedicated to propping up the nation-state framework of capitalism. Their calls for “sustainable” population limits echo Morrison’s reactionary pitch that “we’ve got to keep population growth under control in our big cities.”

At Labor’s national conference last December, conscious of mounting popular opposition to the bipartisan inhumanity, Shorten promised to gradually increase the humanitarian intake to 32,000 by 2025–26.

Not only is this woefully inadequate in a world where more than 60 million people have fled their homelands, but in the same breath Shorten reiterated Labor’s ongoing support for the brutal “offshore processing” regime and vowed to boost the military-police operation to block refugee boats.

The SEP warns: The putrid nationalism of the entire political establishment feeds into preparations for war, with all these parties committed to the American military alliance and Washington’s confrontation with

China in order to reassert US global dominance.

The police-state methods unleashed against refugees also set precedents for use against all workers and youth as opposition mounts to the worsening social inequality, austerity measures, climate change and danger of war.

The SEP is standing in the election to advance the opposite program: Workers need to consciously unify their struggles across national borders to meet the terrible dangers posed by the crisis of the global profit system. They must replace it with genuine socialism, based on harnessing the vast resources and technological advances of humanity to meet the needs of all people, not feed the insatiable appetites of the wealthy ruling class.

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