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No choice for workers in the “interest rate” election "He who rises on the interest rate, falls on the interest rate."

John Howard looks like doing just that. Last election he promised to keep interest rates at an all time low. There have been six interest rate rises since. Middle Australia has been hurt. He has tried to sidestep by claiming that this promise was made in a one-off TV ad that aired for only two days. A lie! Howard made his promise on no less an authority than Australian Broadcasting Corporation radio. Middle Australia is angry.

Howard has a reputation for lying and getting away with it. He lied on children overboard; Iraq having weapons of mass destruction; on not introducing a GST and WorkChoices. Middle Australia accepted his gross dishonesty because he brought home their bacon. They identified, in fact, with his chauvinism. Howard has made them feel empowered by stating “We decide who lives in this country”. Even those who hated Howard on issues such as indigenous reconciliation voted for him for fear of losing their homes.

This election is different. Voters' hip pockets have been affected by rising home interest rates and reduced wages, penalty rates and holiday pay from the introduction of WorkChoices. Last election, Howard promised no significant industrial reform. He couldn't resist the temptation, however, when the Coalition won control of the Senate. He genuinely expected the unions to lie down and die. He was wrong!

Despite a massive taxpayer-funded PR campaign promoting WorkChoices, workers realise rights like penalty rates and holiday pay are being thrown out the window. WorkChoices has become a dirty word. The fundamentals still remain - it is hard to sell Howard's industrial relations policy to an understandably skeptical public.

Meanwhile, Labor is getting its act together. Kevin Rudd has been selling himself as a John Howard with a friendly face and a bit of personal decency. Howard has discovered that many of his voters were lumping his dirty tricks rather than liking them. Kevin Rudd puts his cards on the table: “I am an economic conservative”. He states his position clearly without any opposition or challenge. Labor Left leader Anthony Albanese on Channel Nine's Sunday show proclaimed his opposition to Rudd's policy on uranium but was sympathetic to his chumminess with business leaders, including Rupert Murdoch.

The Kevin Rudd way of political struggle is either to say “me too” or to sweep the issue under the carpet. He has backed the Federal military invasion of the Northern Territory. His main concern is the drain on state police forces. In the Northern Territory Black people have been deprived of their money. There has been a wholesale government takeover of communities with the government given itself the right to exclude any individuals as it sees fit, for any reason whatsoever! Basic rights have been tossed out the window! The wholesale abolition of the CDEP work for the dole scheme will provide a few new jobs at full award rates of pay. Most aborigines will have no money and nothing to do. Communities rely on CDEP for infrastructure which will now run down. All work should be paid at full award rates but this is not what Howard offers. This is no solution to the problem of child sex.

Rudd has been silent about the Howard Government's despicable racist campaign against Sudanese. He has also been silent about Howard's vicious attacks on the social security system. In 2006 when Howard introduced laws forcing some disabled off the pension and onto the dole queue, Labor's then shadow minister Penny Wong promised they would be attacked even harder. Today, under Howard, victims of cystic fibrosis may be forced to work even though this could reduce their life expectancy!

Rudd probably considers his minimalist approach to be tactical. He feels that by reducing the campaign to a few key issues, a clear choice will be shown and voters will prefer him. This is, of course, a massive sellout. He sees the main issues as home interest rates, Iraq and Afghanistan, the environment and a plan for the future.

The government has been exposed as liars on the economy and on interest rates. However, Rudd and Swann have an uphill battle presenting themselves as credible conservative alternatives. Howard and Costello have runs on the board. “Learner Latham” was an easy target. Rudd has more Establishment credibility but still has to show that he can deliver.

He is certainly under pressure on industrial relations. The Liberals have promoted the fact that 70% of his cabinet has a union background as some sort of major threat to the economy. A worried Rudd reacts by expelling from the ALP any union member who threatens an employer. Capitalists are welcome within Rudd Labor. Union militants are not. This message is coming over, loud and clear

Rudd has promised to scrap WorkChoices and tear up AWA's. Whilst this sounds promising, his proposed alternative is aptly nicknamed Work Choices Light by many union militants. It is, in fact, a serious attack on the workers' rights:

The right to strike has been seriously restricted - the only period where you may strike is within the project period and there must be a secret ballot. It bans strikes in solidarity and in response to an unfair employer who, for example, victimises a union official or carries out unsafe work practices.

It bans the right of entry to union officials in the name of “getting the balance right”. This makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for unions to organise!

John Howard seduces the middle class by appealing to their nastiness - their chauvinism. Kevin Rudd seduces them by appealing to their niceness. Both Howard and Rudd are recruiting them to a reactionary, conservative, capitalist programme. They blatantly and honestly admit to being economic conservatives. It's not a case of exposing Rudd when he gets into office. Rudd has put his reactionary cards on the table even before getting there. He is totally unworthy of any support.

Unions and unionists already suffering from the Rudd machine should draw up a balance sheet of the events that have led to this reactionary conservative take-over of the ALP. It started off as a party dedicated to serving working people. The Rudd take-over is no accident and stems from the failings of yesterday's reformism. A total break from reformism must be made.

This election Communist Left is giving critical support to the Socialist Equality Party. We do this because, unlike other groupings, it puts socialism on the electoral agenda. Socialist Alliance calls itself socialist but does not raise the demand for socialism in any form in its programme. The SEP does.

However, the SEP has some major failings. It is sectarian to trade unions, justifying its actions by pointing to the rotten role of the trade union bureaucracy in drawing up the Prices and Incomes Accord. This was a major strait jacket on class struggle. Workers correctly understand that they need defensive organisations to protect their unions when attacked. The answer is not to abstain but to fight for a revolutionary party leadership. This the SEP refuses to do.

The SEP claims to defend "the authority of the International Committee". The International Committee for the Fourth International was dominated for decades by the clique around Gerry Healy. He and his associates ran a bureaucratic machine that made treacherous deals with the likes of Colonel Qaddafi of Libya and Saddam Hussein of Iraq. The ICFI under Healy sold its principles for cash. It is an insult to the great revolutionary Leon Trotsky that his fourth International was associated with this treacherous outfit.

Whilst we certainly don't suggest you join the SEP, voting for it is a step forward politically. Voting for Labor, the Greens or Socialist Alliance is

Turkey threatens Iraqi Kurdistan

The Kurdish question has been a major issue since the beginning of the Iraqi invasion. It has posed a problem for the occupying imperialist coalition. When George Bush accused Saddam Hussein of mass murder or genocide against his own people, he meant the Kurds. Certainly, the Kurds were victims of Saddam's ruthless rule. Bush used their liberation as part of his rationalisation for the conquest of the whole of Iraq. Of all the ethnic groupings present in Iraq, the Kurds have been the most wholehearted supporters. Saddam's treatment of the Kurds has been a key rationalisation for those who consider themselves "left" or "progressive" and supported the war.

As the invasion was being prepared, Turkey put its foot down. In no way would it support an independent Kurdistan, breaking free from Iraq. The US and Coalition partners kow towed and promised there would be no independent Kurdistan.

There isn't a Kurdish state. However, there is an area where Kurdish people have quite a degree of freedom and local autonomy. Turkey finds this a threat as it shows what potentially can be achieved and might inspire Kurds within Turkey. The Kurds in Iraq are also in solidarity with those over the border. They support the freedom fighters that Turkey dismisses as terrorists. Turkey feels that it cannot tolerate this and is threatening to invade. Such an invasion could have massive consequences.

The Kurdish question was created by the imperialists. They drew up the borders and with a stroke of the pen the Kurdish nation (of over ten million people) ceased to exist. Divided between Turkey and Iraq, the Kurds have had to fight two wars simultaneously, against both countries. Their cause is just. Kurdistan has its own distinct language and culture, so it should be recognised as a nation. Revolutionary communists must fight for its right of self-determination. The imperialists only talk about self-determination, hypocritically, the bourgeois nationalists of Turkey and Iraq, not at all.

Imperialism raised the issue of the Kurds to rationalise invasion. For decades they had blocked with Saddam and Turkey for their bloody suppression. This suppression continues to this very day in Turkey. The threat of invasion is now threatening to increase oil prices. This makes the imperialists nervous. They should also be worried about a Turkish-Kurdish war. This could develop into a Turkish-Iraqi war which might find the US-dominated coalition either forced to withdraw or fight Turkey.

US Secretary of State Condeleessa Rice has just completed discussions with Turkey. She concluded that the Kurdish question is not just an issue for Turkey but an issue for both the USA and Iraq as well. What she is conveying is that the Kurds not only have Turkey to deal with, but the Coalition and the Iraqi's too. So it is right for Turkey but wrong for Saddam to fight the Kurds. The Kurds find themselves under attack from both sides. The limited respite they received after the invasion is now over

Liberals election ploy – scapegoat the Sudanese

For months Howard has been trailing in the opinion polls. Whilst he realises that the only poll that really counts is the Federal election itself, he knows he is on the nose with middle Australia and must do something urgently. He's throwing them a fist full of dollars in the form of reduced tax. To look good and to win back the grey vote he's also giving money to pensioners.

Another vote catching gambit is racism. In the nineties, he used the "children overboard" scandal. It worked by creating fear of migrants and won votes for the Liberals. In 2007, Sudanese are being targeted.

Kevin Andrews has announced a cut back in Sudanese refugees. He claims it's now safer in the Sudan for these mainly Christian refugees from the southern region known as Dafur. He says they hang around in gangs here and have trouble assimilating in Australia. At the moment it's a bit safer in Dafur, but only temporarily. Murderous gangs could strike at any time. For many there moving on may be the only

alternative to death.

His claim of Sudanese gangs here is, frankly, a racist beat up. In Australia there are plenty of youth gangs who congregate, sometimes for crime, but more often simply to be among friends. White Australia can be an alienating place especially if you come from a foreign country. Of course you prefer to mix with your compatriots. In no way does this suggest that young Sudanese don't want to fit in. Frankly we don't care if they don't want to. We fully support their right to maintain their own culture.

Mainstream television stations, Channels Seven, Nine and Ten are party to this racist attack. ABC TV show Media Watch exposed this news item as not only an exaggeration but an outright racist lie. At the beginning of the news we were told that here was the "shocking truth" about Sudanese gangs, then we were shown footage of youths attacking and stealing from a pub in Noble Park, a suburb of Melbourne. The problem was that not one of the youths present was Sudanese. Neither the police nor the publican saw the attack as a race issue. The commercial networks made it so to assist their Liberal mates.

One politician gaining from this campaign is the notorious racist Pauline Hanson. She warns of the threat of AIDS if Africans are allowed into this country. Once again Howard aids the fascists. The good news is that the campaign isn't working. A mass public meeting in Wagga Wagga sent a strong message of opposition to Howard on this issue. We on the left must not be complacent. We must send a strong message to both Howard and all racists that every ethnic grouping is welcome in this country.

Burma: For a proletarian vanguard to fight the Junta

At the end of September, at least half a million protesters marched through Rangoon and the towns and cities of Burma. They were led by men in saffron, the Buddhist monks. They talked of peaceful democracy. They were met with gunfire. How many were murdered is not clear. What is clear is they were killed for the "crime" of peaceful protest. In no way did these protesters threaten the state.

Those who are in the know about Burma are surprised that many more were not brutally dealt with. If you are overheard saying the "d" word by one of the numerous secret agents you may face nine years in a Burmese jail. You will also be tortured. Tens of thousands of Burmese are now political prisoners. They are systematically tortured. However, the world was watching and whilst the Junta decided to appear to be well behaved, it couldn't appear to be weak and appear to lose control.

The USA has been embarrassed into sanctions of some sort. Bush finds the junta useful in his campaign to surround China, so he can turn a bit of a blind eye to the junta's naked brutal military repression.

In many ways the US imperialists would prefer the National Democratic Movement led by Aung Sung Suu Kyi who is now under perpetual house arrest. Her crime is to want to stand for election and win more popular support than the junta. They would prefer her because she would open up Burma to the multinationals – open slather. The junta supports those multinationals that support them, multinationals like Total Oil of France. To what extent these multinationals will come to her aid remains to be seen. For the proletarians of Burma, a US-dominated Burma should not be an option to fight for. The proletariat must lead the Burmese revolution!

It is a matter of urgency that a proletarian vanguard be formed. It is odds on that Aung and her NDM will sell out either to the imperialists or to the junta (with some power sharing deal). Either way, working people will be the losers.

The junta must be overthrown and democratic rights restored. This must be carried out through the working class of Burma leading the struggle for proletarian revolution. We have no faith in Buddhist or bourgeois democrats! The working class cannot win by itself alone. The importance of democratic demands is to win over sections of the petty bourgeoisie. Workers must win over sections of the peasantry through a programme of agrarian reform. Workers must take up the rights of national minorities suppressed by the junta. The reality for Burmese proletarians is death and repression. The future must be revolution

Seventeen NZ leftists arrested under reactionary terrorist act

On October 17, the New Zealand terror state came down on sections of the left like a ton of bricks. 200 armed police descended on the 17 left-wing, largely unconnected activists and charged them under the Terrorism Suppression Act. They include Maori, anarchist and ecology activists. Included amongst those arrested is well known Maori leader Tame Iti. They all have been denied bail until the state finds (or fabricates) sufficient evidence. The New Zealand Labour Government, led by Helen Clark, has backed this grossly unjustified repression.

These activists are all connected to the militant anti-capitalist movement that cropped up at the end of last century. They believe in adventurist direct action with out the significant social base capable of fighting and defeating the system – the working class. We must be critical of their political method. But in no way are they Osama Bin Ladin. They are not linked to any Muslim extremist movement or anything like it. The cops will undoubtedly find the odd unlicensed gun but possessing a gun, legal or otherwise, doesn't make one a terrorist. Tami Iti has been guilty of shooting the NZ flag and chaining himself to a railway track.

The use of state repression like this from a so-called Labour Government is outrageous but not surprising. Clark administers a Labour government dominated by US imperialism (which controls NZ) and therefore she must be seen as pulling her weight in the US imperialist orchestrated "war on terrorism". This will earn her some brownie points. It is also an extremely effective weapon to silence left-wing opposition in that country. "Stand up against our reactionary policies, and we'll brand you a terrorist and put you away forever" is a pretty heavy threat against those wanting to fight the imperialist offensive.

Over the Tasman the left is organizing. The Australian left and the workers' movement must take a stand in solidarity. Australian Unions must take direct action until the 17 activists are freed and charges are dropped! Clark is supposed to be Labour and Howard is supposed to be Liberal but they are both capable of reactionary state repression against the labour movement and the left. So too will be a Rudd government, if elected.

Communist Left of Australia stands for...

- building a revolutionary alternative to Labor
- political power to poor and exploited through a revolutionary workers' and small farmers' government
- revolutionary expropriation of capitalist industry (as opposed to bourgeois nationalisation)
- a Sliding Scale of hours and wages
- occupations against sackings
- organising the unemployed
- rent control a programme of useful public works
- women's and gay rights. free abortion on demand. socialise housework and child care.
- opposition to all immigration controls
- self-determination to the indigenous peoples of Australia.
- class unity with workers of Asia, the Pacific and elsewhere. no to tariffs and protection. defend jobs everywhere! no to import controls!
- total opposition to Australian intervention in PNG, Bougainville, Indonesia, Timor, the Pacific, in the Middle East and elsewhere. workers' action against Australia's participation in the US imperialist war drive (including under the banner of the United Nations).
- a new revolutionary communist international

write: P.O. Box 260, St. Peters. N.S.W. Australia. 2044

or xred39@hotmail.com

read: www.geocities.com/communistleft