

Australian Labor Party infighting erupts after leadership ballot

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The Labor Party's efforts to project a new "unified" front with the installation of Bill Shorten as leader on Sunday—supposedly "drawing a line" under the divisions that wracked the Rudd-Gillard governments—lasted all of 24 hours. Bitter factional feuding re-emerged throughout this week, together with recriminations against former prime ministers Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard issued by their rival supporters.

Shorten's rival, former infrastructure minister and deputy prime minister Anthony Albanese, lost the leadership vote despite winning a poll of Labor's 30,000 members by 60 to 40 percent. Under new leadership election rules introduced by Rudd earlier this year, the Labor leader is now elected on the basis of a combined membership and parliamentary caucus vote, with each ballot assigned a 50 percent weighting. Albanese's margin of victory in the membership vote was just below Shorten's win in the caucus, where he received 55 of the 86 votes. Shorten's right-wing factional allies voted en masse for him, while seven MPs from Albanese's so-called "left" faction defected to Shorten, giving the necessary margin of victory to effectively nullify the membership ballot.

At the beginning of the Labor leadership contest, the *World Socialist Web Site* stated: "An important factor in the Labor leadership outcome may prove to be Shorten's very close ties with Washington." The question now is whether the US had a hand in ensuring that its preferred candidate won.

Shorten has long enjoyed the closest of ties to the US embassy in Canberra, as documented in the WikiLeaks-published diplomatic cables, and played a pivotal role in orchestrating the removal of Kevin Rudd as prime minister in the June 2010 Labor Party coup. Rudd had antagonised the Obama administration by attempting to mediate between US and Chinese strategic interests in the Pacific. Once in office, Gillard unconditionally realigned

Australian foreign and military policy with Obama's aggressive "pivot to Asia" aimed at encircling Beijing. Albanese was among Rudd's closest supporters when the Labor Party was in office.

The Fairfax press reported on Wednesday that Albanese's supporters were accusing the Shorten camp of "dishonesty and 'vote selling' for jobs in the caucus ballot." Given the narrow margin of Shorten's win—52 percent in the combined tally—just a handful of caucus votes decided the outcome. Shorten was also scrambling to shore up his low membership vote. The article alleged that "a parcel of votes was delivered to the ALP's national headquarters by the Right faction last Friday, an hour before the membership election closed."

The article concluded: "While Mr Shorten and Mr Albanese emerged from the leadership contest professing support and respect for each other, sources suggest the relationship is more strained after Mr Shorten and his supporters were seen to engage in activities during the ballot which were 'not in the spirit' of the contest."

No further detail has been forthcoming from any section of the media about these alleged incidents. The political and corporate establishment has closed ranks behind Shorten, who was also the favoured candidate of key sections of big business and of the Murdoch and financial press.

However, the divisions that wracked the party over the past six years remain. Albanese and the "left" faction were clearly bitter over the defection of their colleagues to Shorten and blocked their selection for the shadow cabinet. Ex-government frontbenchers and "lefts", former multicultural affairs minister Kate Lundy and indigenous health minister Warren Snowdon were demoted. Right-wing MP Laurie Ferguson declared this "sad collateral payback."

Also missing out on a shadow cabinet post was the former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Anna

Burke, who subsequently said she felt “bitter and twisted.” Burke wrote an opinion piece for the *Guardian* website declaring that “the current outcome of the shadow ministry reflects an immediate reversion to the ‘faceless men’ being firmly in control ... one has to question the newly found ‘democracy’ in the Labor Party.”

The so-called democratisation of Labor promoted by both Shorten and Albanese was a fraud. The party is a hollowed-out bureaucratic apparatus that functions to advance the interests of finance capital and the ultra-wealthy. After the working class repudiated Labor in record numbers at the September 7 election, resulting in its lowest vote in more than a century, the party’s factions, representing rival cliques of self-serving careerists, are now squabbling over parliamentary positions.

Recriminations are continuing. Retired Labor MP and former health minister and attorney general Nicola Roxon delivered a speech on Wednesday attacking Rudd. The 2010 leadership change, she admitted, had been “an act of political bastardry”, but had been justified “because Kevin had been such a bastard himself.” Roxon again reiterated the bogus explanation for the Labor coup, i.e., that it was motivated by Rudd’s rudeness and chaotic management style. This was again aimed at covering up any examination of the real political issues involved in Gillard’s installation, above all the question of her role in Australian imperialism’s unequivocal strategic alignment with Washington’s “pivot.”

Roxon’s speech was followed by former Labor Senator Trish Crossin, who declared that people would be “shocked” if she revealed what she knew about Gillard, who as prime minister had orchestrated Crossin’s removal from parliament.

Shorten yesterday announced the Labor front bench. Most of the appointments involved former government ministers being given new portfolios. While Chris Bowen remains shadow treasurer and Anthony Albanese infrastructure spokesman, Penny Wong has switched from finance to investment and trade, Stephen Conroy from communications to defence, Richard Marles from trade to immigration, Catherine King from regional affairs to health, and Kate Ellis from early childhood to education. The shadow cabinet will further promote the right-wing agenda of militarism and austerity that was implemented the former Labor government.

The Labor leader was also careful to save positions for the remaining US embassy “protected sources” who orchestrated the 2010 coup in parliament—David Feeney,

now shadow justice minister and assistant defence spokesman, and Don Farrell, now spokesman for veterans affairs and for the official ANZAC centenary celebrations, due to begin next year. Each year ANZAC Day marks Australia’s military involvement in the disastrous Gallipoli campaign during World War I. Farrell was promoted even though he will be a Senator for just over seven months. The *Australian* reported that the appointment was “considered odd—even by some of his factional allies.”

Shorten’s deputy, Tanya Plibersek, claimed the foreign affairs post, replacing the retiring Bob Carr, while also taking on the role of shadow minister for the Centenary of ANZAC. That the opposition deputy leader and another senior MP have been assigned responsibility to promote the orgy of militarism and nationalism that is being prepared to mark the anniversary of World War I underscores the Labor Party’s instrumental role in promoting past imperialist wars, in order to pave the way for new ones.

Plibersek, a “left” faction member, secured the foreign affairs portfolio despite the Liberal-National government attempting to use against her comments made in parliament in 2002 describing Israel as a “rogue state” and Ariel Sharon as a war criminal. Plibersek pointed out that she had repudiated these statements in 2011, saying she had “spoken injudiciously” and no longer held such views. Several Zionist organisations defended the MP and said they looked forward to working with her. The revealing episode underscored the Labor Party’s subservience to the geostrategic orientation of the US and in the Middle East, its key ally, Israel.



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