

Embattled Australian Labor Party leader appeals for business support

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Facing rumoured challenges to his leadership, Australian Labor Party leader Anthony Albanese has made his most craven pitch yet to big business for support, both for himself and for the return of a Labor government.

Albanese used a Labor Party business fundraiser last week to declare Labor is “pro-aspiration, pro-entrepreneurship, pro-wealth creation and pro-growth.” Such language embodies Labor’s commitment to meeting the profit requirements of the corporate elite, and enforcing them against the working class.

Albanese’s message was even more explicit than in his previous “vision” speeches since being installed as Labor leader following the party’s crushing defeat at the May 2019 federal election, in which its vote fell to a century low of 33 percent.

In his initial post-election speech, Albanese outlined Labor’s shift to a more openly pro-business program. He vowed to forge closer ties to business leaders, boost “wealth creation,” rather than “wealth distribution,” and pursue bipartisanship with the Liberal-National Coalition government of Prime Minister Scott Morrison.

Last week, Albanese went further. He pledged to collaborate with the business chiefs and the trade unions to impose the restructuring of economic and class relations being prosecuted in the COVID-19 pandemic, which is accelerating at the expense of workers’ jobs, wages and basic conditions.

“We should be cooperating in the knowledge that ultimately, we are all on the same side, striving for the same objectives,” he told the corporate executives in his zoom address to the “2020 Remote Federal Labor Business Exchange Program.” He added that “you will always have my respect—and my ear.”

Albanese insisted: “This isn’t a sudden Road to Damascus moment for me. It’s a message I have been delivering for two decades in public life.” He quoted a

speech he had given in 2018 honouring the legacy of Gough Whitlam, the Labor prime minister from 1972 to 1975.

“In the Whitlam Oration in 2018, I said this: ‘Successful Labor governments collaborate with unions, the business sector and civil society to achieve positive outcomes in the national interest.’”

Albanese drew attention to Labor’s “constructive” and “supportive” legislative record during the pandemic. Since March, Labor has passed every Morrison government bill, including multi-billion dollar handouts to business and huge tax cuts for high-income households. Albanese said Labor hoped to replicate this “constructive” relationship with business.

The Labor leader sought to justify his plea to business by saying “when business does well, workers do well, and vice versa.” In reality, the interests of workers and employers are diametrically opposed.

Currently, despite the resurgence of the pandemic globally, corporate profits are being boosted by lifting safety restrictions, regardless of the risk to safety. Mass unemployment and the cutting of JobKeeper and JobSeeker payments are being used to coerce workers into lower-paid employment on worse conditions. To intensify this offensive, governments, both Labor and Liberal-National, are imposing public sector wage freezes.

At the same time, Albanese voiced concern about deepening working class discontent. He warned the business leaders that “as we wrestle with the economic conditions, there’s another challenge waiting for politicians and business, and that is the slow but steady erosion of our standing in the eyes of the public.”

The Labor leader appealed for business to work with Labor and the unions to “solve this growing deficit of trust.” He said business was “working this out and is already working to address it.”

Albanese did not elaborate on this comment, but it

evidently referred to the months of closed-door talks since March between government ministers, business groups and union officials to draft new workplace laws that will facilitate a further union-backed assault on workers' jobs and conditions.

Albanese hails from Labor's nominal "Left" faction, as did Julia Gillard, a previous prime minister. His stepped-up overture to the corporate elite is revealing on several levels. In the most immediate sense, it is his response to the internal plotting against him. It is not yet clear who might challenge Albanese, but the knives are out. According to the corporate media, the "killing season" has begun, ostensibly triggered by Albanese's failure to win popularity.

Two days before Albanese's speech, his deputy chief of staff, Sabina Husic, resigned after a complaint was posted online that aired accusations against personnel in his office. Albanese denounced the dossier as a "fake" and Husic said the document, purporting to be from Labor staff, was "malicious, false, fake and defamatory."

At the beginning of the previous week, Labor's national "Right" faction convenor Joel Fitzgibbon quit the shadow ministry in a bid to provoke a move against Albanese. Fitzgibbon denounced Labor's promises to reduce carbon emissions, despite the limited and pro-business character of its proposals. His stance reflects the interests of the multi-billion dollar coal industry, for all his claims to champion the jobs of coal miners in his rural electorate.

Fitzgibbon embarked on a media blitz that included him calling for Labor's shadow climate change minister, Mark Butler, to be dumped from his portfolio at a planned end-of-year reshuffle.

Former party leader Bill Shorten, who presided over Labor's 2019 election defeat, has used media interviews to pointedly praise the attributes of Tanya Plibersek, an alternative "Left" standard-bearer. There is speculation of another factional power-sharing challenge, with Plibersek partnering with a "Right" leader.

Whatever the immediate infighting, Albanese's reaction underscores the true class character of the Labor Party. Labor is a party of big business, with a long record of serving the interests of the Australian capitalist class and its US and other imperialist partners. Any lip service that Labor and its union collaborators pay to a "fair go" for workers is designed to divert and stifle the mounting disaffection produced by decades of widening social inequality, deteriorating living and working conditions and participation in imperialist wars.

Albanese's main pitch is for the ruling class to again

rely on a union-supported Labor government amid the greatest economic breakdown since the 1930s Great Depression, as it did under Whitlam during the global turmoil of the 1970s, prime ministers Hawke and Keating in the sweeping pro-market restructuring of the 1980s and 1990s, and prime ministers Rudd and Gillard during the post-2008 global financial crisis.

From Labor's birth, formed by the unions in the 1890s, it has been committed to the defence of the Australian capitalist nation state, and provided its founding racist and nationalist ideology of "White Australia."

Labor leaders always vehemently opposed any perspective based on the necessity to overthrow capitalism, insisting that the working class could improve its lot through militant union struggles or by voting for Labor. Within the framework of a nationally-regulated economy, the ruling class could be pressured for certain concessions, as initially occurred under Whitlam.

But that national reformist program was shattered by the globalisation of production from the 1980s, which enabled transnational corporations to shift their operations from one country to another to secure lower labour costs.

The government-union Accords of Hawke and Keating marked the transformation of Labor and the unions, like their counterparts worldwide, into apparatuses that reverse the past gains of the working class in order to help make "their" national capitalist economy "competitive" on the world market.

Albanese personifies the true anti-working class character of this party. His entire political career as a Labor apparatchik and parliamentarian occurred during this period, ultimately becoming a key cabinet minister under Rudd and Gillard.

In the 2019 election, millions of workers based on bitter experience, simply did not believe Labor's phony promises to secure "fairness" from the wealthy elite. But votes of disgust and protest are not enough. What is necessary is a clear political break from Laborism itself, and the turn to building a new socialist leadership to overturn the bankrupt capitalist profit system.



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