

Murdoch newspaper promotes Australian Labor leader

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Under conditions of a worsening COVID-19 pandemic and related political crisis, the *Australian*, Rupert Murdoch's national flagship, last week published two "exclusive" interviews and an editorial boosting Labor Party leader Anthony Albanese.

Once more, as in the past, the *Australian* and other Murdoch media outlets are turning toward the Labor Party as a possible means of containing social and political discontent that a Liberal-National Coalition government is proving incapable of suppressing.

The newspaper's promotion of Albanese came as a series of media opinion polls provided a limited indicator of the mounting popular hostility toward the political establishment, particularly Prime Minister Scott Morrison's federal Coalition government, for its disastrous corporate-driven failure to protect the population from the rapid spread of the coronavirus Delta strain.

The polls register a sharp drop in approval of the Morrison government's handling of the pandemic, and a broader fall in support for all the parliamentary parties, Labor included. On a "two-party-preferred" basis, the polls suggest the likelihood of a landslide defeat for the Coalition, allowing a potential Labor victory, in the next federal election, which is due to be held by next May.

The *Australian's* July 17 editorial was titled: "Albanese finds the centre ground." It commended him for continuing "his efforts to drag Labor to a more centrist position across a broad range of difficult policy fronts."

While there was "a long way to go," the editorial praised Albanese on three main fronts. The first was his alignment behind the Biden administration's escalation of US imperialism's confrontation with China.

In one of his interviews with the newspaper, Albanese

emphasised his agreement with President Joe Biden's declaration of an existential "competition" with Beijing. He reiterated the declaration, made at this year's Labor Party national conference, that the first "pillar" of a Labor government's foreign policy would be the US alliance, followed by two other "pillars"—"regional engagement" and "support for multilateral forums"—that are also directed against China.

At that party conference, the Labor and trade union leaders presented themselves, and a Labor government, as the most reliable vehicle for imposing on the working class the sacrifices demanded by the ruling class during periods of war and social unrest, as Labor had done during both world wars.

In the interview, Albanese also pledged to retain a bipartisan offensive against Beijing. He said Labor was "at one" with the Morrison government on the South China Sea, Hong Kong, "human rights for the Uyghurs" and "protecting Australia's sovereignty." On these issues, "there is no difference," he declared. These are all key parts of the intensifying barrage of media and political accusations against China, depicting it as a threat to Australia itself.

The second front was Albanese's explicit support for the continuation of Australian capitalism's lucrative coal mining industry, combined with an economic nationalist pitch of proposing to find ways to build new manufacturing capacities based on refining mining products, such as iron ore.

Albanese dressed up this pitch in terms of job creation, supposedly in making solar panels and wind turbines, but the editorial noted that it "fits well with rising concerns about the nation's unhealthy dependence on China," which is by far the country's largest export market, especially for iron ore, as well as

coal and gas.

The *Australian* editorial's third front was "Labor's support for the legislated stage three tax cuts." In recent weeks, Labor leaders have firmly committed themselves to retaining these income tax cuts, which they helped the Morrison government pass through parliament in 2019, following Labor's election debacle of that year.

Under this bipartisan plan, by 2024, the income tax system will be transformed into a virtual flat tax regime, with a 30 percent rate applying from \$45,000 to \$200,000. This will deliver a further wealth boost to the most affluent layers of society.

According to Treasury estimates, a dual-income household on \$400,000 will enjoy an annual tax cut of \$23,280, but a single person on \$30,000 will receive just \$255, or \$5 a week. Those dependent on poverty-line social security payments, such as aged pensioners, carers and the unemployed, will get nothing.

This tax package inevitably also means further severe reductions to already deteriorating social programs, including public healthcare, education and housing. By Treasury calculations, the tax cuts will cut government revenue by more than \$300 billion over 10 years.

Labor's backing for this further wealth transfer from the working class to the corporate elite is consistent with its historical record, particularly since the Hawke and Keating Labor governments of 1983 to 1996. Working hand-in-glove with the trade unions via their Prices and Incomes Accords, they cut the top income tax rate from 60 percent to 49 percent, and the company tax rate from 49 to 33 percent.

The *Australian* editorial is not entirely new. Since Albanese was installed as Labor leader after the party lost the 2019 election despite the unpopularity of the Morrison government, the Murdoch media has both supported him and demanded that he go further in passing the political "tests" it set for him. These included him maintaining Labor's "constructive" supportive relationship with the Morrison government in response to the pandemic, and praising the measures taken by the trade unions, in partnership with the government, to enforce widespread cuts to workers' wages and conditions.

Nevertheless, the editorial marks a stepping up of preparations in the ruling class to back the return of another Labor government as support for the Liberal-

National Coalition falls away.

In previous periods of economic crisis and rising working class struggles that Coalition governments could not deal with, Murdoch outlets swung behind Labor, backing the elections of the Whitlam government in 1972, the Hawke-Keating government in 1983 and the Rudd-Gillard government in 2007. Likewise in the UK, Murdoch advocated the election of the Blair Labour government in 1997.

Today's public health, economic and political crisis, however, is even deeper. For decades, popular support for both Labor and the Coalition has increasingly dropped as successive governments have presided over an endless assault on working class conditions in the interests of the ruling financial elite, producing a staggering growth of social inequality.

Only the systemic suppression of workers' struggles by the unions, via the Accords and the system of enterprise bargaining and anti-strike laws imposed by Labor and the unions, has permitted this offensive to continue.

Now in Australia, as internationally, a new period of explosive global class struggle has begun, intensified by the COVID-19 disaster produced by capitalist governments around the world. Workers from the Volvo Truck plant in Virginia to the Smeaton Grange warehouse workers in Sydney have come into conflict with the unions trying to impose more sellout agreements on them, presaging convulsive upheavals to come.

Albanese's promotion by the *Australian* is a warning of the discussions underway in ruling circles, not least in the Labor and union leadership, about bringing another pro-business Labor government to office to carry out a program of preparing to join a US-led war against China and conducting an accompanying domestic war against the conditions and basic social and democratic rights of the working class.



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