

Polls point to historic political crisis in Australia

Mike Head**18 January 2022**

Anger and loathing toward the Liberal-National Coalition government and the political establishment as a whole is continuing to mount. This is threatening to further destabilise the ruling order, which has not had a full-term majority government since the landslide defeat of the Howard Coalition government in 2007.

The underlying disgust has been deepened by outrage over the rising toll of working-class COVID infections, hospitalisations and deaths—directly produced by the profit-driven “let it rip” program adopted by the bipartisan “National Cabinet” of federal, state and territory government leaders.

The long-developing political crisis is all the more acute because it has thrown into doubt the government’s plans to call an election. Prime Minister Scott Morrison had considered announcing a snap election for March, based on trumpeting hopes for a post-pandemic “economic recovery.” But that plan has been derailed by the disaster fuelled by letting loose the highly-transmissible Omicron mutation.

According to the Constitution, an election must be held by May, but the very scale of infection, already exceeding a million people this year and still rising, may make voting problematic. Voters will not want to join polling booth queues of potentially infectious people.

The latest corporate media poll, a Resolve survey published in Nine Media outlets today, gives another pale and distorted insight into the political disaffection.

It shows that primary vote support for Morrison’s government plunged from 39 to 34 percent from November to January, pulling it below support for the opposition Labor Party for the first time in recent years.

Nonetheless, Labor’s rating rose only from 32 to 35 percent, barely above the near-record low of 33 percent it secured in losing the last federal election in 2019. That is because Labor, working closely with the trade unions, has been just as intent as the Coalition on “reopening” the

economy and pushing workers into potentially dangerous workplaces, and teachers and students into unsafe schools.

Both Morrison and Labor leader Anthony Albanese registered negative approval ratings. Morrison scored minus 9, just ahead of Albanese on minus 7, pointing to wide detestation with both the parties that have ruled the country for a century.

Most ominously for the parliamentary elite, support for “other” parties and “independents” rose to 20 percent. The Greens remained stuck on 11 percent, with their own pro-capitalist policies failing to appeal to the discontent.

Counting the Greens, 31 percent of voters favoured a choice outside the Coalition and Labor, a much larger result than at the last election, when the figure was 25 percent. In another indication of political turmoil, many voters said their support could change, with 27 percent describing themselves as uncommitted.

Significantly, when asked who would perform best on healthcare and aged care, only 28 percent of voters nominated the Coalition, and 34 percent Labor, leaving 38 percent opting for “someone else” or undecided. There was a similar result on education.

The poll was taken amid soaring COVID infections—far surpassing any levels previously suffered in Australia—leading to the overwhelming of hospitals and aged care facilities, as well as the collapse of tracing, vast queues at testing centres, and acute shortages of rapid antigen tests (RATs). In addition, there are ongoing delays in the provision of “booster” vaccines and inoculation of school-age children.

This all is the result of the federal, state and territory governments, both Coalition and Labor, dismantling essential COVID-19 safety measures and trying to force workers back into workplaces, even when actually or possibly contagious.

There is widespread shock at the brutal shift by governments to demand that people “live with the virus”

after largely keeping infections contained for 18 months by adopting safety measures, including limited shutdowns, under the pressure of working people insisting on the protection of health and lives.

Despite the frantic efforts of governments and the mass media to pump illusions in a corporate-led “recovery,” the vast majority of people have “voted with their feet.” They are staying away from shops, hospitality venues and travel destinations, resulting in a new downturn and business complaints of a “shadow lockdown.”

Nine Media publications said “the grim mood in the community” was confirmed in the Resolve poll’s national outlook index, which fell to 88 points in January from 102 points in November and 110 points in October. This means that more voters think the “national outlook” will get worse.

Nine Media chief political correspondent David Crowe commented: “Scott Morrison needed a summer of love. He got a summer of loathing instead.”

This opposition to the homicidal “back to work” drive will only grow as governments seek to herd students and teachers back into crowded classrooms within the next few weeks. A recent survey of families found that just one-fifth believed it was safe for schools to return.

For all the government and media lies that Omicron is “mild,” the COVID death toll is rising exponentially. Today, the most populous state, New South Wales, recorded 36 lives lost—a new record. Victoria announced 22 fatalities and Queensland a record 16, taking the national toll to a new daily record of 74, with some jurisdictions still to report.

Moreover, the medical evidence has exposed official claims that Omicron would be a “Christmas present,” providing immunity from further infection. It is now clear that Omicron infections, even with “booster” vaccinations, are no protection against re-infections, either by Omicron or Delta variants, after a few months, let alone any guarantee of immunity from future mutations.

Even before the Omicron wave exploded, the Morrison government was on its knees, beset by internal rifts and unable to pass key bills through parliament in December unless it had Labor’s backing.

Labor and the unions are doing everything they can to hold back a social explosion, suppressing strikes as they have for decades. Albanese gave an interview to the Nine Media outlets today, again pitching for business backing for a Labor government to more reliably deliver the corporate agenda, acting in concert with the unions.

A day after Oxfam reported that the super-rich doubled their fortunes in the first two years of the pandemic, Albanese said he would offer voters an election platform to help create personal wealth for millions of “aspirational” people. Speaking of “the labour movement’s historic mission,” he said: “I’m very concerned about creating wealth.”

Albanese also again aligned himself behind the increasingly aggressive US confrontation with China, saying he was open to boosting military spending if required.

With many workers demanding action against exposure to infection, the unions are trying to head off stoppages by pleading for collaboration with employers. The Australian Council of Trade Unions convened a meeting of union leaders yesterday. They “resolved to write to all employers reminding them of their obligation to do all that is reasonable and practical to keep workers safe.”

Far from threatening strikes, as corporate media platforms claim, the meeting urged employers to provide free RATs, upgraded masks and improved ventilation so that production could continue despite the raging pandemic, which is now striking down up to half the workforce in some industries.

These union bureaucrats know that any eruption of working-class struggle would shatter not just the Morrison government but the capacity of a Labor government to impose the requirements of the corporate boardrooms. To break out of the Labor-union straitjacket, the anger and resistance among workers needs to be guided by a socialist perspective, based on the protection of health and lives, not private profit.

As the Socialist Equality Party explained in its recent open letter to workers in Australia: “These sentiments must be transformed into a political movement of the working class, directed against the entire capitalist political establishment, including Labor and the unions, which have unfurled as their banner the mass illness and death of working people. Urgent action must be prepared, including strikes and shutdowns to close non-essential workplaces and to prevent children and teachers being forced into schools that will function as incubators of mass illness and death.”



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