

Business leaders and Murdoch editor praise Australian Labor Party leader

Mike Head
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Australian Labor Party leader Anthony Albanese received two glowing promotions in the corporate press last weekend. Big business chiefs and a prominent journalist, well-connected to the US-linked intelligence networks, extolled his political qualities.

A feature-length interview by Jacob Greber in the *Australian Financial Review* (AFR) magazine was headlined: “New-look Albo: ‘I’m comfortable in the boardrooms as well as the pub.’” On the same day, the *Australian*, the Murdoch media’s national flagship, featured Albanese’s “most wide-ranging interview on foreign affairs and national security,” conducted by foreign editor Greg Sheridan.

The lionising of Albanese is revealing. With the deeply unpopular Liberal-National Coalition government wracked by infighting, Prime Minister Scott Morrison’s approval ratings sinking further into negative territory and an election looming by May, key elements in the ruling class, both in Australia and the United States, are looking to a Labor government under conditions of an escalating war in Europe, the ongoing pandemic disaster, staggering social inequality and declining real wages.

In the AFR, Greber lauded Albanese for having “ended all talk of Labor’s war on the ‘big end of town.’” That was a reference to the phoney “fair go” rhetoric of Labor’s 2019 election debacle, in which few workers believed Labor’s promise of limited tax measures against wealthy layers.

Greber highlighted Albanese’s plan to emulate the supposed “consensus” politics of the 1983 to 1996 Hawke and Keating Labor governments, which worked closely with the trade unions to ruthlessly restructure the economy along pro-market lines at the expense of working-class jobs, conditions and basic rights.

“I’m comfortable in the boardrooms as well as the pub,” Albanese told Greber, and repeated his previous statement that Labor was “seeking renewal, not revolution.” This points to the key role to be assigned by the boardrooms to any incoming Labor government: to suppress working-class discontent and prevent it from turning in a socialist direction against capitalist rule.

Among the corporate leaders singing Albanese’s praises to Greber was Jennifer Westacott, the CEO of the Business Council of Australia (BCA), which represents the largest corporations operating in the country. She said Albanese had worked “really hard to pivot Labor” to work with business since Labor’s 2019 election loss.

Westacott enthused that Albanese “gets the role of the private sector,” just as much as Morrison. He understood that “you’ve got

to have the right economic conditions [so] that business can thrive.”

Another admirer was former BCA president Tony Shepherd, despite his “strong ties to the Coalition.” A long-time agitator for lower corporate taxes, and greater “workplace flexibility,” Shepherd told Greber: “I always found him approachable.”

Rod Eddington, a former British Airways boss, said business found encouragement in Albanese’s approach. Richard Goyder, a corporate boardroom member and ex-CEO of the Wesfarmers retail network, said: “He always reaches out to me. He’s open. He listens.”

One business leader told Greber that Albanese had an excellent “business network.” Among those on Albanese’s “speed dial,” together with Westacott and Goyder, were Macquarie Bank’s Nicholas Moore, Qantas boss Alan Joyce, company director Mark Birrell, banker and company director David Gonski, and former Australian Industry Group CEO Heather Ridout.

Greber noted with appreciation Albanese’s evolution from “a young Labor rabble-rouser.” Albanese assured Greber that he had always been a supporter of business and “the creation of wealth, not just its distribution.”

This speaks volumes about the role and trajectory of Labor’s “Left” faction, in which Albanese has been a key figure for three decades. Like the Labor Party as a whole, it has always been thoroughly committed to defending and maintaining the capitalist profit system. Its onetime fraudulent claims to represent “fairness,” and even socialism, sought to divert the discontent and struggles of the working class back behind the big business Labor Party and the parliamentary establishment as a whole.

Albanese indicated the affluent and upper middle class social base on which Labor has increasingly depended. He boasted of winning the support of “pretty wealthy” voters in his inner-Sydney electorate. Such layers were the only ones in which Labor won greater support in the 2019 election, even as its vote plunged to a near-record low.

Despite the promotion of Albanese, an accompanying AFR editorial demanded that he make his pledges to business more specific. He had to supply “hard details” about delivering “incentive-sharpening tax and workplace reform” to boost productivity and pay down the massive public debt incurred from bailing out business during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Mr Albanese could be the leader that Labor and Australia both need right now,” the editorial concluded. But he had to prove that

he was “a true believer in Hawke-Keating style reform for a more competitive and prosperous Australia.”

Total commitment to the US alliance

In his extended interview with Sheridan in the *Weekend Australian*, Albanese underscored Labor’s unconditional commitment to the US military alliance and the Biden administration’s escalating confrontation with both Russia and China.

The interview was conducted after a fortnight of frenzied allegations by Morrison’s Coalition government that Labor was insufficiently aggressive toward China, and was in fact Beijing’s “pick” for the forthcoming election.

Albanese responded by boasting that the AUKUS pact, signed by Australia with the US and UK in September, directed against China, and featuring the supply of nuclear-powered attack submarines to Australia, could not have gone ahead without Labor’s support. A “precondition of American support was that there be bipartisan support for it in Australia,” he said. “Without Labor’s support, it wouldn’t have happened.”

Sheridan agreed. He hailed Albanese for changing Labor’s previous opposition to nuclear-powered submarines. The interview’s introduction declared: “If Australia does end up getting nuclear submarines through AUKUS, these powerful boats will have a most unlikely hero: Anthony Albanese. The Labor leader has come a long way.”

Albanese did not stop there. He denounced China as “aggressive” and stridently backed Morrison’s flat rejection of any discussion with China on the “14 points” of complaints that its embassy issued in November 2020. The 14 complaints included discriminatory tariffs on Chinese products, a ban on the Chinese telco company Huawei supplying 5G technology, and far-reaching bans on Chinese investment in Australia. Echoing Morrison’s inflammatory accusation that these grievances amounted to “coercion” of Australia, the Labor leader described them as “very provocative.”

The interview took the form of an audition. Sheridan asked: “So how does Albanese feel about the national security and intelligence agencies themselves, especially ASIO [the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation], once a hostile obsession for the far left of the Labor Party.”

The Labor leader assured readers that he had developed a “very good relationship” with these agencies, all of which are closely integrated with those of the US and other members of the “Five Eyes” spy network—the UK, Canada and New Zealand. He also had “a high regard for all the current heads of the national security agencies.”

Similarly, Albanese vowed that a Labor government would be “absolutely serious” about increasing military spending. “It’s at least 2 percent of our GNP on defence, it may well need to be more in the future,” he said.

In fact, Albanese criticised the Coalition government for not

delivering an effective or substantial military buildup. It had also “wasted billions of dollars and many years” on submarines it did not pursue, including the French submarine contract that the government scrapped last September to enter the AUKUS pact.

Significantly, Albanese presented Labor as the best party to conduct war. He boasted of Labor’s record of leading the country during World War II, boosting the commitment to the US alliance in the 1980s and 1990s and signing the 2011 pact to base US marines in the strategic northern city of Darwin.

Sheridan noted that the marine hosting decision, “which Albanese strongly supported as a cabinet minister at the time, has laid the groundwork for steadily expanding US military involvement in northern Australia, which Albanese supports.”

The Labor leader avoided mentioning the fact that the minority Gillard Labor government, which signed the basing deal with the Obama administration, was kept in office via an agreement with the Greens, who also support the heightening confrontation with Russia and China.

Sheridan emphasised that Albanese was part of “the ‘sensible’ social democratic tradition in national security.” The journalist remarked that the “communists” hated the social democrats “because they convinced the working class that reform was better than revolution.”

That says a lot about the concerns in ruling circles that, as the war, political and social crisis intensifies, workers will turn in a revolutionary socialist direction against the entire capitalist order. Labor and the trade unions are above all needed to head off and quash such a development.

Sheridan concluded by noting Albanese’s political “journey:” “He did start political life as an activist on the radical left within the Labor Party... As early as 1990, however, he took a trip with the US State Department and spent six weeks falling in love with the US... He’s come a long way, Albo.”

As with the AFR feature, this is instructive of the true character and trajectory of the Labor “Left.” Since 1990, Labor, including all its the “Left” ministers, has either joined or given essential bipartisan backing to every barbaric US-led war of conquest since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union, from the first Gulf War to the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and the regime-change assaults in Libya and Syria.

Albanese’s PR promotion is a warning that any Labor-led government will be one of pro-US militarism, “wealth creation” for the rich, and deeper attacks on the jobs and conditions of the working class.



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