

A revealing interview with Australian Labor leader Albanese

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The interview conducted by right-wing Sydney radio host, Ray Hadley, often referred to as a shock jock, with Labor leader Anthony Albanese on April 26 cast a revealing light on the Labor agenda should it win power at the May 21 election.

Hadley began by saying he liked Albanese as an individual but not the people around him.

Albanese insisted he was proud of his team and that he aimed to “present a mainstream forward agenda for a better future.”

As Albanese put in his budget reply speech, as he sought to distance himself from the very limited measures offered under Bill Shorten in 2019, the agenda “isn’t radical” and Labor was promising “renewal not revolution.”

The use of the term “mainstream” is politically significant. It is not determined by the needs of ordinary working people but is the translation by the corporate media into the sphere of politics of the demands of the corporations, finance capital and the dominant power, US imperialism.

Of course, this cannot be said directly and must be obscured by professions of concerns for the needs and interests of ordinary people.

Accordingly, at the start of the interview Albanese told Hadley: “I want to deal with the challenges that are out there.”

Hadley’s listeners, he said, were “doing it tough” and knew that “the price of everything is going up except wages.”

But he provided no answers, except to mention the need for better childcare. This is not a plan to increase wages. It is directed to ensuring that more women are available to the workforce and the increased income they bring to the family may help to alleviate cost of living pressures.

Of course, well-funded childcare facilities are a necessity in modern life.

But the Labor plan is not to lift wages but to ensure that employers have a greater pool of labour to draw upon and that any family can spend more hours at work, making more profit for their employer, as they struggle to make ends meet or to provide improvements in their living standards.

It is very much in line with Labor’s insistence that the key economic issue is to “boost productivity”—a phrase Albanese used seven times in his budget reply speech. Within the framework of the capitalist profit system increasing productivity has a very specific meaning.

It signifies that every hour worked lifts the amount that is used for profit accumulation by the employer.

Labor has always sought to promote nationalism in all areas of policy and Albanese pulled out the nationalist card on the economy. He said he wanted “more things made here” and that “I want a future made in Australia.”

The pandemic, he said, had shown that we “have to stand on our own two feet” and not continue to operate at the end of a global supply chain.

Albanese’s nationalist pitch is directed—as with all right-wing nationalist populist tendencies—at promoting the illusion among workers that the mounting problems they confront are the result of the globalisation of production and can be overcome by turning back the clock to some mythical past.

However, history shows that Australian capitalism has never been some nationalist exception but has always been subject to global processes—its involvement in two world wars, the effects of the Great Depression, among the most severe of any country—demonstrates that fact.

The globalisation of production is an historically progressive development that has increased the productivity of labour, on the basis of tremendous technological developments.

But, like every development of the productive forces under capitalism, it is a two-edged sword. When machinery was introduced into capitalist production in the 19th century, the reaction of the working class was to initially oppose it and call for a return to previous times.

But the advanced sections of the working class, through bitter struggles, came to learn that the problem was not the machine as such but the private ownership of these means of production, and technological advance provided the basis for advancement of civilisation if freed from the grip of private profit.

Those lessons, derived by socialist-minded workers in the past, must be relearned today.

The task is not to overturn globalisation and turn back to the national hearth but to recognise where the essential problem lies.

Globalisation of production, while it is utilised by capital to batter down living standards, at the same time provides the material basis for the development of humanity if it is controlled and organised by the international working class, the

producers of all wealth.

This is why the Socialist Equality Party opposes all the reactionary nationalist nostrums which Albanese sought to revive in his remarks to Hadley.

The vicious character of this nationalism—a stock-in-trade of the Labor party from its very origins—was revealed in Albanese’s response to Hadley on the question of refugees.

Anyone still harbouring even the vague hope that a Labor government would take a different stance on the current refugee policy—one of the most inhumane in the world that became the model for other governments, including in the UK—would have been disabused of that illusion.

Albanese was at pains to point out that the policy of refusing entry to refugees, in defiance of international law, had been initiated under the Rudd-Gillard governments in which he was a minister.

The previous Labor government had determined that “if you come to Australia by boat you will not get in,” he told Hadley.

“We support turn back the boats, we support offshore processing, we support settlement in third countries,” he insisted, and the policy overseen by Morrison in the Abbott government, Operation Sovereign Borders, would apply. There was no equivocation, not even the suggestion of mitigation.

On the issue of climate change, Hadley pressed repeatedly to extract from Albanese a commitment there would be no significant measures to deal with it.

This took the form of an insistence he repeated, so it was on the record, that there would be no carbon tax under a Labor government.

Both of them would have recognised that much more was involved. It was a commitment that nothing essentially different from the Morrison government’s policy on climate change would be carried out under Labor.

The only significant area in which Albanese and the Labor Party have sought to differentiate themselves from the Morrison government is on the question of the Solomons and the agreement between the Sogavare government with China. Labor has denounced it as the worst foreign policy failure in the post-war period.

Albanese trotted out the now well-rehearsed line that the Morrison government had failed to intervene at a sufficiently high-level.

Hadley repeated over and over that Sogavare and members of his government were in the pay of China and preparing to make off with their ill-gotten gains placed in Swiss bank accounts—an assertion that, significantly, Albanese did not object to.

Sticking to the script, he pointed out that the US had sent one of its top State Department officials, Kurt Campbell, to the Solomons and there had been no comparable response by Australia.

But after noting Campbell’s intervention had not turned the situation, Hadley asked what Labor would do if a military base were established—something the Sogavare government has

insisted will not take place.

Albanese’s reply made clear the direction of Labor policy, not only on the Solomons but on every issue as the US steps up its war drive against China.

“We will respond with our partners in United States and our other partners. We will be about stopping it, stopping it. We will do what’s necessary to stop it,” he said.

A statement issued by the White House during Campbell’s visit to the Solomons makes clear what is involved.

“If steps are taken to establish a de facto permanent [Chinese] military presence, power-protection capabilities, or a military installation, the delegation noted that the United States would then have significant concerns and would respond accordingly,” it said.

Under conditions where the Sogavare government has been destabilised by a right-wing separatist movement in the Malaita province, promoted by Washington, this is a threat to carry out a regime-change operation.

Albanese’s response to Hadley made clear that a Labor government will be directly involved in it.

The interview as a whole underscored that, as the SEP has insisted, the Labor party is not advancing a program which in anyway meets the needs of working people. Rather it is presenting itself as the best option for the ruling class as it imposes the effects of the deepening economic and social crisis and aligns itself completely with the US war drive.

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