

Pseudo-left Socialist Alliance promotes Australia's new right-wing Labor government

Oscar Grenfell**31 May 2022**

The pseudo-left Socialist Alliance organisation has rushed to hail the result of the May 21 federal election as a step forward, opening up the prospect of a new period of “progressive reform.”

This is a continuation of Socialist Alliance’s own election campaign. The pseudo-left party stood candidates in several states, but insisted that the primary task was the removal of the former Liberal-National Coalition government through support for Labor and the Greens.

The election result showed a widespread rejection of this perspective of “lesser-evilism,” which has been trotted out for decades by pseudo-left groups together with the corporatised trade unions and a broader upper middle-class milieu.

Labor and the Liberal-National Coalition received their lowest combined primary vote in history, reflecting a growing recognition that there is no difference between the major parties of big business on the issues of war, mass COVID infection and social austerity. The collapse of their vote represents a major crisis of the two-party system that has been the basis of capitalist rule in Australia for the past eight decades.

Under these conditions, Labor rushed to cobble together a government, even though it received its lowest primary vote since 1934, and had to rely on the preferences of other parties. The Murdoch media, along with powerful sections of the ruling elite, asserted that Labor leader Anthony Albanese was the leader of a majority government, when this was entirely unclear given the number of seats in doubt.

Socialist Alliance immediately assisted the efforts to provide the new administration with legitimacy. Its particular function is to put a “left” gloss on a right-wing government that is already committed to a program of war abroad and an onslaught on the social position of the working class at home.

In a jubilant article on May 22, Socialist Alliance proclaimed: “Climate change makes its mark on Australian elections.” The outcome had demonstrated that the “grassroots movement” was “having an impact” in the corridors of power.

Socialist Alliance hopefully predicted a minority Labor government that would be dependent on the support of Greens and “Teal independents.” “The Greens and independents could push the new government to go beyond the timid and conservative ‘small target’ platform Labor campaigned on,” the article stated.

“Whether the new Labor government will take real climate

action and address growing social discontent will depend in large part on further strengthening the social and union movements,” it continued. In other words, the role of workers and young people is to pressure the Greens and the independents and, through them, Labor, to the left.

The suggestion that climate change will be resolved through machinations in parliament is a sham. All of the parties referenced by Socialist Alliance, including the Greens and the Teal independents, hew their climate program to the wholly inadequate targets haggled at international summits, which fall far short of the immediate action scientists have insisted is necessary to avert a global disaster.

The various market-based solutions championed by the Greens and the Teals have failed to halt emissions where they have been introduced, instead creating lucrative new financial markets. This expresses the fact that climate change is fundamentally a product of the capitalist profit system itself, based upon the subordination of every aspect of social life to profit, and the irrational division of the world into antagonistic nation-states. The only realistic solution lies in the abolition of capitalism and the reorganisation of social and economic life on a global scale.

More broadly, Socialist Alliance’s schema was directed against any class characterisation of the new government. Labor heads a capitalist government beholden to the banks, big business and the military-intelligence establishment. It has made no secret, moreover, of the policies that it will implement to advance these interests.

It made a direct pitch to the ruling class that a Labor government would be better placed to oversee the sweeping austerity measures that are on the agenda to pay for a national debt of almost one trillion dollars, accrued through massive handouts to big business over the past two years. At the same time, Labor presented itself as a better partner for the US administration of Joe Biden as it prepares for war with China in the Indo-Pacific.

Labor’s election campaign, far from being “lacklustre” and “timid,” was the most right-wing in the party’s history. It expressed Labor’s transformation over the past four decades into an unalloyed instrument of the corporate and financial elite with no connection to the social interests of the working class.

This has been confirmed by Labor’s first week-and-a-half in office. The first act of the new government was to dispatch Prime

Minister Anthony Albanese and his foreign minister Penny Wong to Tokyo for a meeting of the Quad, a de facto military alliance of the US, Japan, India and Australia, directed against China.

Albanese proclaimed his full support for the US alliance after Biden had stated that the US was prepared to go to war with China over control of Taiwan. Labor then dispatched Wong to the Pacific, where she functioned as an anti-China attack dog on behalf of Washington to undermine a tour by Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi.

Domestically, the new government has declared a budget “black hole” that will necessitate “sacrifices,” including further cuts to health and disability services. And it has pledged to oversee a “productivity drive,” i.e., the stepped-up exploitation of the working class.

As for the crossbenchers whose election Socialist Alliance hails, they are no less committed to the profit system and its agenda of war and austerity. The “Teal” independents speak for some of the wealthiest sections of the population. They combine phony posturing over climate change, for which they propose totally inadequate band aid measures within the framework of capitalism, with “fiscal responsibility,” i.e., support for the dominance of big business.

The Greens, far from pressuring Labor to the left, have spent the past months begging it for a power-sharing arrangement. In the final stages of the campaign, the Greens explained that there were no conditions on such a de facto coalition. Since the election, the Greens’ overtures have been rebuked by Albanese, but Greens leader Adam Bandt has insisted that his party will ensure budgetary supply for Labor no matter what, while continuing to plead for a formal alliance.

The rightwing character of the new government is already exposing Socialist Alliance’s bankrupt perspective. An article on May 26 bemoaned Albanese’s participation in the Quad. Socialist Alliance, however, has supported the US-led war drives in Libya, Syria and now, against Russia in Ukraine. Its occasional condemnations of militarism are a cynical cover for an organisation that is firmly part of the pro-imperialist left.

The May 26 article, moreover, provided an alibi for Labor’s preparations to inflict sweeping austerity. It declared that as a result of the deepening global economic crisis, “The new Labor government is facing almost impossible tasks.” Under these conditions, Socialist Alliance’s perspective was reduced to the following: “Any reform, any tinkering at the edges, is to be supported and welcomed...”

In other words, Socialist Alliance does not even pretend to advance a socialist perspective for the working class in opposition to Labor and the capitalist system it defends. Instead, it insists that workers and youth must remain within the existing political set-up by holding out the false hope that Labor will “tinker at the edges.”

Socialist Alliance’s positions express the interests of an affluent layer of the upper middle-class ensconced in academia, the top echelons of the public sector and the trade union bureaucracy. The privileges of this social milieu depend upon the suppression of the working class and its subservience to the political establishment.

For the layer represented by Socialist Alliance, a Labor government opens up new opportunities. The organisation has

close ties to the union bureaucracy which will be more formally integrated into the structures of capitalist rule by Labor, including with a tripartite summit between the government, the major corporations and the unions, committed to stepped-up pro-business restructuring.

Socialist Alliance used the election campaign to deepen its ties to the Greens, collaborating closely with them in Queensland, where the Greens won several seats. Socialist Alliance has expressed its hope that the Greens will continue these “insurgent campaigns.” What this really means in practice, is that Socialist Alliance will offer the Greens fraudulent “left” credentials while the party continues to collaborate with Labor.

In a post-election video, Socialist Alliance leaders Sam Wainwright and Alex Bainbridge insisted that it would be entirely legitimate for Greens MPs to become ministers in a Labor government. They only expressed concern that the Greens maintain a “left posture,” as well as relations with the “grassroots movements.”

Labor has already signalled that it will bring forward various forms of identity politics, associated particularly with gender and race. It has boasted that its cabinet being sworn in today, contains the largest number of female MPs in history, while Labor has elevated issues of Aboriginal nationalism to centre stage.

The function of identity politics is to bury the class questions and divide the working class while advancing the interests of a privileged social layer.

Specifically, Labor’s advancement of feminist and black nationalist politics is aimed at putting a fake “progressive” veneer on a government of war and austerity, and at drawing a broader upper middle-class constituency that is obsessed with such issues, and indifferent to the plight of the working class, behind it.

The Socialist Alliance and the pseudo-left generally, which are steeped in such identity politics, will undoubtedly serve as cheerleaders for Labor’s moves in this direction as it did under the last Rudd-Gillard Labor governments.

In other words, the pseudo-left groups are a key prop of the Labor government and the political establishment. Workers entering into struggle against the government must reject the sham arguments of “lesser-evilism.” Instead, they should take up the genuine socialist and internationalist perspective of the Socialist Equality Party, based on the fight for the political independence of the working class, and a revolutionary opposition to the existing social, economic and political order.



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