

Ex-PM and governor-general both defend creating secret ministerial posts in Australia

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Former Liberal-National Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Governor-General David Hurley, an ex-head of the military, yesterday both made defiant statements defending their joint actions in 2020 and 2021 in secretly installing Morrison into at least five key ministerial portfolios in response to ruling class fears of growing social unrest triggered by the global COVID-19 pandemic.

These belligerent bids to justify the unprecedented concentration of vast and potentially dictatorial powers in the hands of the prime minister, entirely behind the backs of the population, must be a further warning of the readiness of the corporate, political and military-intelligence establishment to dispense with the façade of the increasingly tattered parliamentary framework when confronted by public health, economic and political crises.

Equally significant yesterday were the increasingly blatant efforts of the current Labor Party Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and his ministers—urged, backed and assisted by the corporate media—to cover up what the revelations of the past few days have laid bare about the real conspiratorial workings of the capitalist state behind the fig leaf of parliament. In particular, Albanese continued to absurdly depict these developments as simply the product of Morrison as an individual, while rushing to defend the governor-general, whose own dictatorial “reserve powers” of the British monarchy were deployed in 1975 to dismiss an elected government, that of Gough Whitlam.

In fact, Albanese and Morrison are on a unity ticket in defending Hurley. Albanese said the governor-general was not at any fault, while Morrison said Hurley had “acted with absolute propriety.” Yet it is already patent that Hurley knew that his serial appointments of Morrison to one ministry after another were not being announced to the public. Hurley’s part in this political crisis is doubly significant because as a former chief of the defence forces, like his vice-regal predecessor Sir Peter Cosgrove, he obviously had close connections at the highest levels to the military and intelligence apparatuses and their partners in the US and UK. Hurley’s central involvement, as the Queen’s representative, in Morrison’s accumulation of powers means that key figures throughout these networks, including in London and Washington, must have known of, and

backed, these processes.

The alarm bells in the ruling capitalist circles over the widespread public outrage over the revelations, and the orders being issued to shut down the furore as quickly as possible, were voiced in yesterday’s *Australian Financial Review* editorial. It warned Albanese that his initial accusation about the “trashing of democracy” was “overdoing it” as were calls to “drum Mr Morrison out of parliament.”

Yesterday’s statements by both Morrison and Hurley raised many more questions than they supposedly answered. Clearly what has been made known to the public so far is just the tip of the iceberg.

The most glaring contradiction in Morrison’s press conference yesterday was his protest that he was under public pressure to take personal control of the response to the pandemic. Yet all these moves were kept hidden from the public! Moreover, as the record of the pandemic shows, the main preoccupation of Morrison’s government, and that of the state and territory governments was in limiting safety measures as much as politically feasible, in defiance of popular demands, and then moving as fast as possible to lift restrictions in order to meet the demands of big business.

Just as untenable was Morrison’s insistence that he acted properly because he did not personally use—or he could not recall using—any of the extraordinary powers allocated to the ministers whom he supplanted, except to overturn a planned approval of a petroleum exploration project off the New South Wales coast in the lead up to this year’s May 21 federal election.

That is no more plausible than Morrison’s initial claim on Monday that he could not recall taking control of any other than the health and finance portfolios, despite the immense powers over government spending, the police and intelligence agencies and the economy contained in the other three ministries so far known to have been taken over—treasury, home affairs and the combined ministry of industry, science, energy and resources.

The same goes for Morrison’s insistence that no one, other than some officials inside his prime minister’s department, Health Minister Greg Hunt, the governor-general and Attorney-General Christian Porter, and later, Resources Minister Keith Pitt, knew about his secret ministerial appointments.

Already, ex-Deputy Prime Ministers Barnaby Joyce and Michael McCormack, and former Finance Minister Simon Birmingham have admitted knowing that Morrison had assumed control over some portfolios. Claims by others, including the then Defence Minister Peter Dutton, who is now the opposition leader, and Albanese, that they knew nothing at all are hardly credible.

At the end of Morrison's press conference yesterday, he freely admitted having told the two Murdoch media journalists writing the book *Plagued*, Simon Benson and Geoff Chambers, about his appointments at the time. "That book was written based on interviews that were conducted at the time, in the middle of the tempest," he said.

That raises further questions about the role of the Murdoch outlets, and possibly other media organisations, in suppressing the news of these moves for the past two-and-a-half years, and then deciding to make it public now.

Hurley's official statement yesterday was just as full of holes. Like Morrison, the governor-general declared he had acted entirely according to his duties. He said he "had no reason to believe that appointments would not be communicated" to the public. Yet it was obvious from Morrison's first appointment, as health minister, that no public announcements were to be made.

All the records of what powers Morrison actually exercised, and who knew about the arrangements, must be released immediately to display the truth, along with the correspondence between Morrison, the governor-general, the US and Australian intelligence agencies and the Labor leadership, as the WWS raised yesterday.

Likewise, there must be the dismantling of the wall of silence being maintained by the Labor government and the corporate media over the other damning revelation of the past few days: That is that Morrison's clandestine assumption of draconian powers, starting on March 14, 2020, was preceded by and bound up with the sudden proclamation the previous day of a previously unheard-of and unconstitutional form of rule—a de facto coalition of Liberal-National and Labor government leaders in a "National Cabinet."

This so-called National Cabinet has no constitutional or statutory basis and is not accountable to any federal, state or territory parliament. In fact, when the National Cabinet was formed, the readiness of the ruling class to dispense with the trappings of parliamentary democracy was demonstrated. Morrison's government declared that the federal parliament would go into recess for five months, and it only met in a reduced rump form for short sittings during most of 2020, despite the availability of video-conferencing platforms.

The "insider" accounts in the just-published book, *Plagued*, about the formation of the National Cabinet show it was driven by the furious determination of Morrison and the state and territory government leaders to block as much as possible the recommendations being made by the country's chief health

officers for urgent crowd limits and shut downs to stem the spread of the pandemic, which had already caused its first five deaths in Australia.

The health officers were facing growing public demands by doctors and other health professionals, as well as by teachers and other workers, for immediate action to protect health and lives. But Morrison and his state and territory counterparts were resisting any safety measures, no matter how necessary, that could affect business profits, either by shutting down venues or by closing workplaces.

That was why all the leaders—the majority from the Labor Party—insisted that the deliberations of the "National Cabinet" and its "subcommittee" of the federal, state and territory chief health officers had to be bound by confidentiality requirements and shielded from Freedom of Information requests. Morrison's government rejected a request by Albanese, as the then opposition leader, to join this body, but Labor was represented through its state and territory premiers and government leaders.

Albanese and the media outlets are seeking to bury these facts because the Labor government has maintained the National Cabinet and all its secrecy provisions for similar reasons—as a vehicle to keep imposing the mounting profit-driven "let it rip" pandemic disaster and the central agenda of the Labor government, which consists of enforcing the greatest real wage cuts compared to soaring inflation since the 1930s Great Depression, slashing social spending, presiding over yawning social inequality and intensifying preparations to join a US war against China.

The very first set of powers that Morrison sought to acquire in 2020 were those of the health minister under the draconian Biosecurity Act. Once an emergency is declared under that 2015 legislation, the minister can issue sweeping decrees and impose "any requirement" on people, including restrictions on movement.

As the WWS warned when the National Cabinet was proclaimed, such measures, also taken under state and territory emergency laws, were not utilised to protect the population, as governments claimed. They were applied arbitrarily and inconsistently, with various exceptions in favour of big business interests, and imposed via frequently-changing ministerial decrees issued without any democratic input.

These measures, approved by the National Cabinet, set precedents that can and will be used by the capitalist governments, Labor and Liberal-National alike, to bolster the police-military apparatus to seek to suppress rising social discontent.



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