Effusive official response to Queen’s death underlines deep political crisis in Australia

Mike Head
12 September 2022

In Australia, as in the United Kingdom and other parts of the former British empire, the death of Queen Elizabeth II, after seven decades as the country’s official head of state, has occurred at a time of deepening economic, social and political crisis.

One aspect of the extraordinary wall-to-wall coverage in Australia of the Queen’s passing and the accession of King Charles III is as a desperate political diversion, seeking to stultify critical thought and project a false image of national unity.

Every corporate media outlet, not least the government-funded Australian Broadcasting Corporation, has subjected the population to saturation propaganda, complete with endless pre-prepared packages, absurdly idealising the Queen—one of the world’s richest individuals—as a virtual saint, selflessly serving the people to the very end of her life.

However, this campaign cannot bury the social reality: the ongoing COVID-19 disaster, the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Europe and escalating US confrontation with China, and the sharpest decline in real wages and living standards that is producing an upsurge of working-class struggles.

The money lavished on the archaic pomp and ceremony—including multiple military gun salutes—to mark the transition to a new monarch stands in stark contrast to the demands of the financial elite, enforced by the Labor government, for workers to take real wage cuts and other “tough medicine” to pay for the inflationary spiral and budgetary debt mountain produced by the Ukraine war and massive corporate bailouts throughout the pandemic.

In fact, the extent of the media operation to laud the Queen, and the accompanying attempt to refashion the image of her elderly son, is an indication of an underlying political crisis, which has been now compounded for the ruling class by the departure of the long-surviving monarch.

Nervously, the Queen is being variously described by media commentaries, editorials and politicians as the “anchor,” “ballast” and “bedrock” that held society together for 70 years amid economic, political and social turmoil. She is also credited with transforming the fading Empire, which once ruled vast territories around the world, into the Commonwealth, a more civilised façade for the prosecution of British imperialism’s predatory interests and ambitions.

Her 73-year-old son Charles will inherit the Queen’s vast wealth as well as her crown, but has little popular support. He is being anxiously depicted as a new king who will emulate his mother in supposed dedicated service to the people, while carefully remaining politically neutral, “above the fray.”

In a sign of the concern in ruling circles, which is shared internationally, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese immediately announced that he and Governor-General David Hurley, the ex-military representative of the Crown, would fly to London for the funeral and talks with world leaders.

As if to underline the anti-democratic character of the monarchy, Australia’s federal and state parliaments were quickly sent into recess, apparently abiding by “protocols” that require such shutdowns for the official lengthy mourning period after the death of a monarch.

In a further bid to create an atmosphere of universal bereavement, Albanese declared a one-off public holiday for September 22 to mourn the Queen’s passing.

Labor’s prime minister, despite being a professed republican, has been unsurpassed in expressing the ruling elite’s debt of gratitude to the Queen and the royalty as an institution. Following a wreath-laying

© World Socialist Web Site

ceremony at Parliament House on Saturday, joined by Liberal-National opposition leader Peter Dutton and a host of diplomats, Albanese lamented what he said was "an enormous loss" of "a constant reassuring presence."

Despite British imperialism's long history of violent crimes of conquest and plunder in Ireland, Africa, the Caribbean, Asia and Australia, Albanese declared that "the Queen was admired around the world as not just our head of state, the head of the Commonwealth, but for her enormous contribution over 70 years as the longest ever sovereign of the United Kingdom and of the Commonwealth."

Albanese even praised King Charles III for his "extraordinarily fitting words" in his televised accession speech, in which Charles lauded his mother for "the affection, admiration and the respect she inspired [that] became the hallmark of her reign."

In all the coverage there has been no mention of the ongoing brutality of British and Australian imperialism under the royal flag, from the savage four-year repression of Kenya's Mau Mau Rebellion after the Queen first took the throne in 1952, to the lengthy bloody occupation of Northern Ireland, the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas war and numerous criminal wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere, where Australian troops joined the US and UK-led invasions.

There was one limited exception. In the *Saturday Paper*, Rick Morton echoed the general theme of the media campaign, saying the Queen had "remained a symbol of relative constancy in a period of global tumult and technological advances," but obliquely referred to this vicious imperialist record. He noted with concern: "While beloved by many, Elizabeth is also the colonial figurehead whose empire has presided over stolen land, stolen wealth and the continued subjugation of people long after her bannered armies have left."

The obsequiousness throughout the media and political establishment is a measure of the dependence of Australian capitalism on the myth of a "constitutional monarchy"—that of a largely ceremonial role existing above parliament and its increasingly discredited parties. At the same time, the "reserve powers" of the former absolute British monarchy are being retained to intervene in dire political crises, as happened with the governor-general's dismissal of the Whitlam Labor government in 1975.

The Queen's death came amid a developing fracturing of the entire political establishment. This year's May federal election highlighted the implosion of support for the two main parties of capitalist rule—Labor and the Liberal-National Coalition—after decades in which successive governments have enforced deepening attacks on working-class conditions. Their combined primary votes fell to an historic low. Labor barely scraped into office after obtaining less than a third of the vote, lacking any popular mandate for its program of austerity and war.

A revealing note of apprehension about the Queen's passing was registered on Saturday by Paul Kelly, editor-at-large of the Murdoch empire's *Australian*. "Sustaining the monarchy in a world demanding social justice, democratic accountability and a war on white, inherited privilege has been a daunting task," he warned.

The monarchy, Kelly admitted, was a "triumph of optics." To elevate the Queen, "an efficient, highly - political Buckingham Palace operation" had mounted "one of the most successful public relations efforts in modern history," aided by "symbolism and secrecy."

Such "optics" will not assist, even if the Labor government and its trade union partners continue to cling to the aura of the monarchy as they seek to impose drastic "sacrifice" on workers and threaten them with the danger of another, even more catastrophic, world war. Decisive working-class struggles lie ahead against the entire capitalist political and economic order, whatever the efforts of the ruling class to glorify the monarchy.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site