

Murdoch media displays Australian Labor PM's close ties to business and dependence on the unions

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Corporate media outlets are going to extraordinary lengths to try to boost the political fortunes of Australia's Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, whose government received less than a third of the primary vote at May's federal election—a near-century low for the Labor Party.

Last week and over the weekend, the *Australian*, the Murdoch media's national flagship, published page after page hailing Albanese's "power network" of big business chiefs, intelligence officials, trade union bosses and members of Labor's "Left" faction, of which Albanese is a longtime leader.

Rather than reflecting any strength, such media glorification is desperate. It underscores the anxiety in ruling circles over Labor's capacity to suppress the brewing working-class discontent and opposition as it seeks to impose a brutal agenda of "tough medicine" and war.

That agenda includes policing sharp real wage cuts amid a deepening global economic and cost of living crisis, and slashing social spending to pay off huge budget deficits produced by corporate bailouts throughout the COVID-19 pandemic—while handing huge income tax cuts to the wealthy and ramping up military spending to participate in a US-led war against China.

The *Australian's* feature articles demonstrate the totally pro-business character of Albanese's government, and its intent to restructure workplace relations to satisfy the demands of the capitalist class.

The articles praise Albanese's particularly close ties, as a Labor "left," to a long list of key big business figures, headed by Qantas CEO Alan Joyce, who has led the escalating employer assault on workers' jobs and conditions over the past decade.

Joyce, who has headed the airline since 2008, is "among those Albanese has brought into the inner circle through relationships forged in opposition and who insiders claim have access and influence," the newspaper emphasised.

Among workers in Australia, the Qantas chief is one of the most hated figures in the corporate elite. In 2011, under the last Labor government, Australia's financial establishment applauded Joyce for grounding Qantas' entire fleet and locking out its workforce to block industrial action by ground crew, engineers and pilots.

Joyce's offensive, which was backed by the Gillard Labor government and its Fair Work Australia industrial court, cleared the way to eliminate thousands more jobs, contract out many

operations and establish new low-cost airlines.

Since March 2020, Qantas has gone further on the offensive. It has exploited the pandemic to accelerate its attacks, destroying or outsourcing more than 8,000 jobs, while receiving repeated huge government support packages. This month, Joyce has been rewarded for his services with a \$287,000 pay rise, taking his salary to \$5,575,000, while insisting that workers' wage rises be kept far below the raging inflation levels.

Qantas, which was privatised by the Keating Labor government in the 1990s, is owned by global investment conglomerates that also control Australia's four major banks, the country's two big mining companies and numerous other industrial, energy and construction corporations (see: "Who owns Qantas").

Others in Albanese's "inner circle" include transport magnate Lindsay Fox, Commonwealth Bank CEO Matt Comyn, iron ore tycoon Andrew Forrest, tech billionaires Scott Farquhar and Mike Cannon-Brookes, PwC boss Tom Seymour, BHP chief executive Mike Henry and veteran company board chief Rod Eddington.

"Industry lobby bosses have also been brought into the tent," the *Australian* reported, including Business Council of Australia chief Jennifer Westacott and Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry head Andrew McKellar.

Another with "a direct line into government" is Australian Banking Association chief executive Anna Bligh, a former Queensland state premier. Her government was defeated in a landslide in 2012 after carrying out sweeping privatisations. Bligh, a fellow Labor "left" who has "known Albanese for decades," told the newspaper, "business now had a seat at the table."

"Prominent businesswomen" made the "power list," especially Chief Executive Women president Sam Mostyn and Tesla chair Robyn Denholm.

Industry Super Australia chair Greg Combet, an ex-ACTU secretary and Labor cabinet minister under the Rudd and Gillard governments of 2007 to 2013, is "highly regarded by Albanese." Union chiefs, who sit on the boards of industry superannuation funds, are significant members of the financial elite. Under the Industry Super umbrella, they control over \$1 trillion in assets, derived from more than 5 million workers.

To further underline his government's commitment to the corporate and financial establishment, Albanese has kept Treasury boss Steven Kennedy in his post, while promoting senior Treasury

officials Jenny Wilkinson and Meghan Quinn to lead the Finance and Industry departments.

These figures were central to the first two years of the ruling class's profit-driven pandemic response, implemented by Scott Morrison's Liberal-National government and the bipartisan "National Cabinet," particularly the \$400 billion in corporate handouts and cheap loans, and the ruthless reopenings of schools and other unsafe workplaces.

Likewise, the *Australian* lauded Albanese for "leaving the national security architecture completely untouched." That includes keeping Andrew Shearer as the head of the Office of National Intelligence, despite him serving as cabinet secretary under Morrison and as national security adviser to ex-PMs John Howard and Tony Abbott, including during the invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Albanese also has retained other prominent "security" figures from Morrison's defeated government, such as Home Affairs secretary Mike Pezzullo, defence secretary Greg Moriarty, Australian Security Intelligence Organisation director-general Mike Burgess and Australian Signals Directorate chief Rachel Noble.

These people have all been involved, in close collaboration with their US counterparts, in ratcheting up the confrontation with China. They have been seeking to condition public opinion to prepare for what would be a catastrophic war involving nuclear weapons, launched by the US against China in order to reassert the global hegemony that American imperialism secured in World War II.

In April 2021 Pezzullo declared the "drums of war" were beating in the region and said the country must be prepared "to send off, yet again, our warriors to fight," as in World Wars I and II.

But the most crucial figures in Albanese's cabal, the ones that the ruling class is depending on the most to stifle unrest and resistance among workers, are the union bureaucrats, especially those from Labor's "left" faction. They are on the frontline of imposing the government's austerity and war agenda.

"[T]hose considered to wield the most power are Sally McManus and Michele O'Neil (ACTU), Tony Maher (CFMEU mining and energy division president and a friend of Albanese), Gary Bullock (UWU vice-president and political director who wields enormous influence over the Left faction) and Right faction union chiefs Michael Kaine (TWU) and Daniel Walton (AWU)."

The *Australian* noted: "Bullock wields power over most state Labor MPs in Queensland and exerts enormous influence across the ALP Left faction. The former United Voice boss, who is political director and vice-president at the United Workers Union, draws on significant funds to bankroll candidates and has considerable power over delegates and votes at ALP state and national conferences."

The naming of Bullock as a crucial Labor "left" powerbroker is particularly significant. UWU [United Workers Union] bureaucrats have played an especially aggressive part in beating down workers' opposition to sellout agreements, including at the Coles Smeaton Grange warehouse and the General Mills plant in Sydney.

Above all, UWU officials have sought to physically block workers from reading articles from the WSWS and holding discussions with Socialist Equality Party (SEP) members about the role of the UWU and other unions in isolating and betraying workers' strikes and struggles, and the need for an alternative socialist perspective.

This bureaucratic and anti-democratic thuggery has been intensified since Labor took office, as seen at recent aged care and child care workers' protests. UWU staff have surrounded SEP supporters to attempt to stop them speaking to workers to explain the necessity to form rank-and-file committees, independent of the union apparatuses, to break out of the Labor-union straitjacket and oppose the ruling class's agenda.

In an editorial, the *Australian* put its stamp of approval on the Labor government's efforts so far. It noted that Albanese and his government "have the ear of trade unions, and they have his." This, combined with Labor's "modernised" relationship with business "will be good for Labor and good for his government."

That only shows how much the ruling class relies on the unions to police Labor's pro-business offensive. To answer this line-up clearly requires a complete break from the Labor-union apparatuses personified by Bullock and his fellow bureaucrats.

New organisations of struggle—rank-and-file committees—have to be established in every workplace to reach out to all workers through the development of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). Such committees can distribute information, organise democratic discussions free of the interference of the union officials, and prepare unified industrial and political action against Labor's pro-business agenda.

As a result of the criminal "let it rip" pandemic policies of Labor and Liberal-National governments alike—enforced by the unions—workers confront ongoing serious health problems, as well as intolerable workloads and working conditions, and the biggest real wage cuts since the 1930s Great Depression.

Albanese's promotion by the capitalist media underscores the need for a socialist perspective, directed against the companies, the government and the unions, all of which insist that workers must "sacrifice" to ensure the already soaring profits of the corporate and financial elite.



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