

Australian parliament censures ex-PM: An extraordinary coverup

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At the instigation of the Labor government, the Australian House of Representatives passed, by 86 votes to 50, an unprecedented censure motion against a former prime minister yesterday.

The motion condemned Scott Morrison, the defeated Liberal-National Coalition PM, for covertly taking control of five key cabinet posts, as well as his own, during the first two years of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Morrison was censured for “failing to disclose the appointments to the House of Representatives, the Australian people and the cabinet, which undermined responsible government and eroded public trust in Australia’s democracy.”

Yet the motion was an act of political theatre. It has no practical or legal consequences for Morrison, who remains in parliament, or anybody else. The only reason for the Labor government moving it was to make yet another attempt to bury the real political implications of the revelations, which showed how quickly the ruling class resorted to extra-parliamentary forms of rule as soon as the pandemic hit.

The fiction presented during yesterday’s proceedings was that the entire affair was simply the product of one man, seemingly a megalomaniac.

This entirely false presentation is belied by the actual record. The National Security Committee of Cabinet was contemporaneously informed of at least some of Morrison’s portfolio appropriations. It was comprised of senior government ministers including present Liberal leader Peter Dutton, top military and intelligence officers, and senior officials in the prime minister’s department. The Murdoch media was aware, via the two journalists who authored the book *Plagued*, early last year.

Moving the censure, Workplace Relations Minister Tony Burke ludicrously claimed that “the conduct of one member prevented the house from doing its job.” According to Burke, Morrison single-handedly “undermined,” “rejected,” “attacked” and “abused” the “core of responsible government.”

Likewise, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese declared that Morrison was solely responsible and owed “an apology to the Australian people for the undermining of democracy.”

Speaking on behalf of the third main party of the capitalist order, Greens leader Adam Bandt sang the same tune. Morrison’s actions, he said, had “undermined our belief and our country’s ability to trust our democracy.”

In reality, “confidence” in the political establishment was corroded long before this, as shown by the votes for the ruling two parties falling to near-record lows, most recently in the federal and Victorian state elections. That is the result of decades of attacks by the corporate elite and successive governments on working-class jobs and social conditions.

Far from instilling any “trust” in the façade of parliament, the whitewashing of the Morrison affair demonstrates the need to draw the opposite conclusion—the necessity to overturn this entire order. It is deepening the assault on living conditions, and intensifying preparations for US-led wars, which will require even greater resort to conspiratorial forms of rule.

As the WSWS explained as soon as Morrison’s multiple appointments became known, it is completely untenable to insist that he was acting without the complicity of many others. That includes the ruling circles in the US and UK. Both Morrison and Governor-General David Hurley, an ex-military chief, have close connections with the US-linked military-intelligence apparatus and Australian bases are central to US plans for war against China.

Notably, Morrison spoke with contempt against the censure motion, branding it “political intimidation.” Equally significantly, he was backed by all but one of his Coalition colleagues, who either voted against the censure or walked out of the chamber. Many lined up, in a public display of support, to congratulate Morrison after he spoke.

Morrison doubled-down on his earlier belligerent declarations that his secret appointments were essential because the country faced “the prospect of civil disruption, extensive fatalities and economic collapse.”

Morrison declared: “I note again that our nation faced the

greatest challenges we had experienced since the second world war: drought, natural disasters, a global pandemic, the global and domestic recession the pandemic caused, and a rising and assertive China seeking to coerce Australia into submission.”

Morrison went further, saying he was “proud” of his actions. “[A]t a time of extreme trial, my government stood up and faced the abyss of uncertainty that our country looked into and the coercion of a region and saw Australia through the storm.”

Morrison contemptuously insisted that people should take the path of “thankfulness” toward him and his government because “Australia’s performance through the pandemic was one of the strongest in the developed world.”

In fact, as the *Plagued* book—an “inside” account—documents, Morrison worked intensively with Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews and other Labor leaders, via the “National Cabinet,” an extra-constitutional virtual de facto coalition government, to oppose and wind back COVID-19 safety measures as much as possible.

The preoccupation in the ruling class was to mislead the public about the dire threat to health and lives, while preventing any restrictions that would affect business profits. The overriding concern was to stifle and suppress opposition by workers and health professionals as the pandemic spread.

Eventually the National Cabinet scrapped nearly all restrictions from December 2021 onward to satisfy the demands of business, with disastrous consequences, resulting in a death toll that now exceeds 16,000 even on the understated official figures.

Significantly, Morrison is about to fly to Washington, to deliver an invitation-only December 6 address to the neo-conservative Hudson Institute about “Australia’s role in combating the threat to a free and open Indo-Pacific.”

According to the think tank: “Scott Morrison successfully led his nation through the most difficult and significant challenges Australia has faced since the Great Depression and the Second World War. On the international stage, Morrison was known for his leadership role to counter an increasingly assertive China in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.”

This is an indication of the support Morrison continues to enjoy in US ruling circles, where Australia is regarded as a spearhead of the US drive to assert hegemony over China. The Hudson Institute has close ties to the American intelligence apparatus. It was founded in 1961 by military strategist Herman Kahn, an advocate of “preventive” nuclear war against the Soviet Union.

By focussing exclusively on Morrison, the government is shielding the governor-general, all the Coalition leaders and other key figures in the ruling elite, including the Labor

leaders themselves.

That Labor leaders were aware was blurred out in August by Industry Minister Ed Husic. In two media interviews he said he was aware in 2021 that Morrison had become the “decision maker” for the industry, science, resources and energy portfolio. Husic further said Morrison, in that capacity, had approved 17 project grants, belying the official story that Morrison only used his vast powers once, to veto an offshore mining proposal.

Labor leaders also knew that Morrison aggregated unprecedented powers in his hands by establishing a furtive one-person Cabinet Office Policy Committee, consisting only of himself, which is now known to have met 739 times during the 45 months he was in office.

Moreover, Labor leaders were well aware of Morrison’s centralisation of power because they were working constantly with him in the National Cabinet. Albanese himself operated in the closest cooperation with Morrison and his government, offering bipartisan support for all the main measures, including the multi-billion dollar corporate handouts, it adopted throughout the pandemic.

For all the Labor government’s feigned outrage at the Morrison government’s “culture of secrecy,” it has retained the National Cabinet regime and kept it shielded from public scrutiny as it has dismantled what remained of health precautions.

The censure motion pantomime is another warning. Labor is helping to keep intact the underlying and potentially dictatorial powers of the state apparatus as it allows the pandemic to continue to destroy the health and lives of working people, intensifies the decades-long assault on workers’ wages and conditions, and accelerates preparations for a disastrous US-led war against China.



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