

Australia: Labor's NSW election launch highlights bipartisan pro-business program

Oscar Grenfell, SEP candidate for NSW Legislative Council
5 March 2023

The Labor Party held its official launch for the New South Wales (NSW) election campaign yesterday. The event, in its form and content, again demonstrated that there is no choice for workers in the official campaign. Labor is running on a virtual unity ticket with its nominal opponents in the governing Liberal-National Coalition.

The launch was choreographed and stale, even by the low standards of such events. It was attended only by several hundred Labor Party functionaries and members, who dutifully cheered each banality from the speakers as if on cue.

Even the timing of the launch was revealing. It was held only 20 days from the March 25 polling day. Both Labor and the Coalition are seeking to ensure the shortest election campaign possible. Having nothing to offer working people, they want to limit discussion and even public awareness that an election is underway.

The election poses a particularly sharp difficulty for Labor and its leader, Chris Minns. The issue is that Labor has and continues to agree with the government on every substantive issue.

Minns has marched in lockstep with the lifting of all COVID safety measures by Coalition Premier Dominic Perrottet. Since Labor assumed office at the federal level in May, the government of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has collaborated closely with Perrottet and the other state and territory leaders to deepen this “herd immunity” agenda.

Labor, therefore, has an identical program to the Coalition on the pandemic which has dominated political, social and economic life for more than three years. More people have died under Albanese than in the entire preceding two-and-a-half years of the COVID crisis. A report released by the Actuaries Institute today found that there were 20,000 excess deaths across the country in 2022 attributable directly or indirectly to the coronavirus.

In addition to supporting policies that are killing thousands of people, Minns has entirely backed Perrottet's sweeping attacks on public sector workers. Minns has denounced striking workers and rejected calls for pay increases in line with inflation. He has stated that even nominal wage rises, beneath the official inflation rate, should be paid for by “savings,” i.e., spending cuts, or greater “productivity,” i.e., worsening

conditions and intensified exploitation.

Amid the greatest crisis of public healthcare and education in history, Minns and Labor have pledged just a pittance to both sectors. Labor opposes nurse-to-patient ratios, one of the main demands of health workers. His program for housing, amid the worst inflation in decades and widespread rent and mortgage stress, is aimed solely at boosting inflated prices to benefit the property developers and the banks.

Confronted with these difficulties, Labor resorted on Sunday to lies, banal generalities and advertising slogans. Labor's main slogan is a “fresh start.” What that means is entirely unclear.

The chair of the launch was Ash Ambihapahar, Labor candidate for the Sydney seat of Oatley. Ambihapahar sought to present the election as a referendum on the privatisation of state assets. She warned darkly that if Perrottet were returned to office he would immediately begin a mass sell-off.

If Labor is fearful that Perrottet is about to privatise state assets, which it purportedly defends, why has Labor collaborated with the right-wing premier for the past two years?

Minns, moreover, has spent his two-decade career in official politics as a proponent of the unfettered free market. Even his factional opponents within the Labor Party have repeatedly accused him of being a supporter of privatisation.

More broadly, a campaign by NSW Labor against privatisation brings to mind a fight by the mafia against organised crime. In reality, there is little for Perrottet to privatise. Just about everything was sold off by the Labor governments that were in office from 1995 to 2011.

NSW Labor privatised the retail and generator sections of the electricity grid, as well as the TAB, FreightCorp and state-owned coalmines. Labor also pioneered the use of “public-private partnerships,” giving private corporations major contracts for state projects that nominally remain under public ownership.

During its last 16 years in office, NSW Labor became notorious for its craven and sometimes corrupt subservience to property developers, bankers and other sections of the corporate elite.

The NSW privatisations, moreover, followed the sell-off of the Commonwealth Bank, Qantas and other major assets by the Hawke-Keating federal governments in the 1980s and 90s.

Ambihaipahar cynically referenced the dire plight of healthcare workers, educators and others, but Labor opposes real pay rises for these workers, no less than the Coalition. Minns's healthcare pledges are almost identical to those of Perrottet. Neither would begin to address the meltdown of the public hospitals, even if they were implemented. On public education, Minns has pledged \$400 million in additional funding over a decade. Even by the understated official metrics, that falls short of what is required by hundreds of millions of dollars.

Albanese was given a hero's welcome by the audience. Ambihaipahar claimed that his government had introduced "compassion" and "respect" to federal politics. What that consisted of, she did not say. In reality, Albanese has deepened Australia's integration into the US war drive against China, while insisting that workers must accept "sacrifices" to pay for the crisis of capitalism.

Albanese touted the indigenous Voice to parliament, a centrepiece of his government. The advisory body to the federal parliament will do nothing to address the horrendous conditions facing Aboriginal workers and youth. Instead, its purpose is to put a progressive gloss on the right-wing Labor government, divert attention from the class issues of war and austerity and further integrate a privileged layer of the Aboriginal upper middle-class into the government and corporate establishment.

Albanese described the Perrottet government as being "plagued by scandal" and "suffering a deficit of character." This is only so much theatrics. If that were the case, Albanese should explain why he has worked in the closest of partnerships with Perrottet. They both travelled to Lismore and northern NSW in the aftermath of the devastating floods to promise aid and rebuilding for the homeless and destitute communities. Neither has been forthcoming a year later.

Striking another improbable note, Albanese declared that "something so much better awaits NSW, and it starts with a great leader." Minns, a colourless career politician who has spent his entire adult life in the factional world of the Labor Party, was "a leader with compassion and empathy ... guided by fairness and integrity."

In the only reference to the COVID crisis of the entire event, Albanese touted the fact that Minns had "chosen to be constructive during the pandemic." What this meant, in fact, was marching in lockstep with homicidal policies, placing profits above lives. Minns, along with Perrottet, Victorian Labor premier Daniel Andrews, former Prime Minister Morrison and Albanese, are responsible for the unnecessary deaths of thousands of people, the outcome of allowing the virus to spread unchecked throughout the community.

Perhaps seeking to explain away the fact that much of the NSW population still does not know who Minns is, Albanese hailed him for "shunning the spotlight that so many other opposition leaders seized."

Minns' own address consisted of platitudes and banalities

poorly read from a teleprompter. In a headline campaign event, his only promises were for 1,000 apprenticeships and traineeships to be created in the public sector, and for three regional ambulance helicopter bases. The policies can only be described as token.

The event again underscored the complete bipartisanship behind letting COVID rip, slashing public sector spending and forcing the working class to pay for the economic crisis. Minns and his campaign sum up Labor's transformation into a bureaucratic shell that exists only to serve the interests of the corporate and financial elite.

The launch was held as polling continues to indicate a crisis for all of the major parties. There are growing fears in ruling circles that the election will result in a hung parliament or a minority government. Every recent election has registered historic falls in support for all the establishment parties.

This is the product of widespread anger and opposition that is building up, above all, in the working class. But those sentiments pose the necessity for a genuine alternative.

That is what the Socialist Equality Party is providing in its campaign. The SEP is alone in raising the critical issues of war, COVID and the need for a counter-offensive by workers against the program of austerity. Above all, the SEP explains that nothing will be resolved within the moth-eaten framework of parliamentary politics. What is required is the construction of a mass socialist movement of the working class, fighting for the complete reorganisation of society to meet social need, not private profit.

Contact the SEP

Phone: (02) 8218 3222

Email: sep@sep.org.au

Facebook: [SocialistEqualityPartyAustralia](https://www.facebook.com/SocialistEqualityPartyAustralia)

Twitter: [@SEP_Australia](https://twitter.com/SEP_Australia)

Instagram: [socialistequalityparty_au](https://www.instagram.com/socialistequalityparty_au)

TikTok: [@sep_australia](https://www.tiktok.com/@sep_australia)

*Authorised by Cheryl Crisp for the Socialist Equality Party,
Suite 906, 185 Elizabeth Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000*



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)