

Australian PM defends attendance at radio host's million-dollar wedding

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Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has flatly defended his seven-hour involvement in last weekend's \$1 million wedding of Sydney radio "king" Kyle Sandilands, a right-wing shock jock, amid an intensifying cost-of-living crisis for millions of working-class households.

There was widespread disgust at Albanese's participation in the extravagant celebration, especially with his government refusing to lift sub-poverty welfare payments under conditions of mounting housing and social need, and rising homelessness.

The old saying of "by your friends, shall ye know him" certainly fitted the Labor Party leader's involvement in the event. It featured an array of wealthy celebrities, media personalities, pop stars, a convicted drug smuggler and an alleged gangland boss, as well as the recently-elected New South Wales Labor Premier Chris Minns.

Within days of joining the ritzy soiree at a Sydney harbourside mansion, Albanese, a supposed republican, further showed his true ruling class colours by landing in London for an audience with King Charles III. That was followed by a prominent attendance at the royal coronation, estimated to cost more than £100 million, and a pledge of allegiance to the monarch, supposedly on behalf of the Australian people.

Some media commentators and others expressed shock at Albanese's decision to join the marriage service and party for Sandilands, who has been known for years for controversial on-air stunts and offensive comments, including denigrating and hurtful remarks to or about talent show contestants, gay men and people with disabilities. Last year, for instance, Sandilands branded monkeypox—a very serious infection and public health issue—a "big gay disease." He was recently ordered to undertake "sensitivity training"

after referring to the Paralympics as "horrific."

Given exclusive access, the Sydney *Sunday Telegraph* provided a glowing picture of the scale and expense of the occasion. "Held in the sprawling grounds of prestigious Darling Point estate Swifts—a castle 'owned by his mate and built by the man who started Tooheys beer'—the million-dollar wedding started with a moving 3pm ceremony, held in a chapel within the historic homestead...."

"After cocktail hour—or two—where the 120 guests enjoyed prawns, oyster shooters and champagne, they moved to the reception for a three-course meal of beef or fish and formalities."

The floral bill alone, for displays that included 1,000 white roses, ran to \$150,000. The venue, the Swifts "castle" is estimated to be worth more than \$100 million, making it possibly the most valuable residential property in Australia.

Some people asked: How did the prime minister's advisers permit this to happen? Sydney journalist Stephanie Wood wrote: "Seriously Albo... Kyle Sandilands wedding? Poor advice, poor optics, poor choice."

Yet, no less than Albanese's flight to London to pay homage to the monarchy, the prime minister's very well-publicised participation in Sandilands' wedding to his partner Tegan Kynaston was clearly based on political calculations.

Having taken office last May with the support of less than a third of voters, after falsely promising a "better future," the Labor government is desperate to retain the backing of influential media outlets and personalities as it imposes a program of cutting working-class living conditions, unveiling massive military spending and preparing to join a disastrous US-led war against China.

Sandilands and his co-host Jackie O held their spot as

Sydney's top-rating FM breakfast radio program in the first ratings survey of 2023, with an audience share of around 16 percent. It seems that their audience is predominantly young, making them a target for the Labor government as it seeks to condition the population, young people in particular, for the "all of nation" war effort called for by its recently-released Defence Strategic Review. That document transforms Australia's military doctrine from one of defending the continent to "impactful projection" across the Indo-Pacific region as part of the increasingly aggressive US confrontation with China.

Albanese defiantly defended his wedding participation. He described Sandilands, who reportedly is paid \$5 million a year, as "a bloke who at one stage was homeless, living on the streets of Sydney, and has grown into someone who is a significant public figure." Albanese said this was "an Australian success story." That speaks volumes about the Labor Party's so-called aspirational and upper middle-class social base.

Albanese insisted that he was invited to the wedding, and had said he would go, "and I keep my commitments, including to Kyle Sandilands." This echoes another commitment made by the Labor government—to deliver the "stage three" income tax cuts legislated by the previous Liberal-National government, with Labor's support. These cuts will hand about \$250 billion to predominantly rich and high-income middle-class households over 10 years, inevitably at the expense of essential social programs, such as public health, education and housing.

Minns, who heads a fragile minority state Labor government, had similar pressing political reasons for joining the wedding extravaganza. His government is attempting to impose sub-inflation wage rises and ongoing staff shortages and intolerable workloads on public sector workers, including the nurses, health workers, teachers and rail workers who joined statewide strikes throughout 2022. Union leaders shut down those strikes by telling workers to place their faith in electing a Labor government, which is now declaring the need for "tough decisions" to pay off government debt.

Sandilands endorsed Minns in the campaign for the March 25 state election, saying he had switched allegiance to Labor from the Liberal Party. He told the *Sunday Telegraph*: "Chris Minns is coming with his

wife as well and the reason is actually because I was a Liberal voter, and I changed to Labor because they're pretty similar—they're not 'right versus left anymore'—Chris is pretty central."

In its own repugnant manner, Sandilands' love affair with the Labor leaders underscores the essential unity between the country's two main ruling parties, on which the capitalist class has relied since World War II, in the face of the increasing disintegration of electoral support for them, especially among workers and youth.

Albanese and Minns are far from being the first Labor leaders to court such figures. During his time as prime minister from 1983 to 1991, Bob Hawke maintained a similar cosy relationship with a previous right-wing talkback radio "king," Alan Jones. For Hawke, Jones was a "mate" in their on-air mutually back-slapping exchanges.

Now, with Labor in office federally and all the mainland states and territories, the corporate elite depends even more heavily than ever on the Labor Party and its trade union partners to suppress workers' struggles and prepare the population for war. In turn, the Labor leaders desperately need the backing of much-promoted media figures like Sandilands to implement their pro-business and pro-war agenda.



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