

Australian PM launches campaign for racist indigenous Voice to parliament

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Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese yesterday announced that the national referendum on the establishment of the Voice, an Aboriginal advisory body to the government, will be held on October 14. The event, in Adelaide, South Australia, was a launch for the “yes” campaign in the referendum.

The form and content of the rally underscored the fraudulent character of the policy. The Voice will do nothing to address the dire plight of most indigenous people. Instead, its aim is to divide the working class along racial lines; further elevate a small indigenous elite into the corridors of corporate and political power, and revamp Australian nationalism so that the government can more effectively advance an aggressive foreign policy in line with the US war drive against China.

The insertion of a phrase “recognising” indigenous people in the Constitution will similarly resolve nothing. The Australian Constitution is a colonial era document with no democratic content whatsoever.

The Adelaide event was highly choreographed and contrived. The audience was entirely handpicked, comprising government politicians, Labor Party members, trade union officials and a thin layer of indigenous bureaucrats and community “leaders.”

Albanese’s speech was a combination of advertising slogans and lies. The mind-numbing banality of the event was summed up by one of Albanese’s slogans, which met with resounding applause: “We rise to the moment, like the kangaroo and the emu on our coat of arms. They never go backwards, they just go forwards. And so do we.”

While presenting the referendum as a “once-in-a-generation chance,” Albanese’s remarks were decidedly thin gruel. He did not outline a single concrete way in which the establishment of the Voice will address any of the issues facing ordinary people, Aboriginal or otherwise.

The first falsehood advanced by Albanese was that the proposal for the Voice “comes directly from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves.” At the most obvious level, that assertion is refuted by media interviews with some of the most oppressed Aboriginal people in remote communities, who continue to tell reporters that they have no idea what the Voice is or what it will do.

The Voice is an entirely top-down project. Its origins can be traced to a July 2015 meeting between then Liberal-National

Prime Minister Tony Abbott, former Labor leader Bill Shorten and 39 handpicked indigenous leaders. Abbott convened the meeting to dampen down widespread anger over his government’s severe austerity cuts.

Out of that meeting came a proposal for an indigenous advisory body to the government. Over the ensuing years, successive governments funded and helped organised gatherings of Aboriginal leaders, culminating in the issuing of an “Uluru Statement from the Heart” by a collection of indigenous CEOs, businesspeople, heads of NGOs and other establishment figures.

The policy was picked up by the Labor government, and elevated into one of its keynote policies, not only to further the broader interests of the ruling elite but to put a fake progressive gloss on its right-wing program. Aside from the Voice, Labor’s central platform is militarism in preparation for war with China and an austerity agenda making deep inroads in the social conditions of working people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike.

Albanese stated that the Voice would be “A committee of Indigenous Australians, chosen by Indigenous Australians, giving advice to Government so that we can get better results for Indigenous Australians.” But the government has previously confirmed that parliament will have the final say on the size and composition of the Voice. Even if there is some sort of sham electoral process, the members of the Voice will effectively be handpicked appointees.

The biggest falsehood Albanese advanced was that the creation of the Voice would ameliorate the horrendous social conditions afflicting most Aboriginal people.

This was connected to a gross historical falsification. Albanese claimed that governments had sought, with the “best intentions,” to address the grinding poverty and social distress facing indigenous workers and youth. The issue, Albanese implied, was that governments had been ignorant of the problems and how to resolve them.

He declared: “With a Voice though, we’ll be able to hear directly from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities about the challenges they face in health and education, in jobs and housing, and we’ll be able to learn about the things are working in local areas, so we can replicate them

and make them work right around the country.”

These statements amount to a whitewashing of past crimes perpetrated by successive governments over decades and decades, including Labor administrations in which Albanese has been a prominent leader.

The attacks on the social conditions of ordinary Aboriginal people have not been an unfortunate mistake. They have been deliberate government policy. The original dispossession of the Aborigines was a crime of capitalism, bound up with the drive to establish private ownership of the land and the foundations of a modern capitalist nation-state.

Ever since, Aborigines have comprised the most oppressed section of the working class. Governments have inflicted decades of cuts to their social conditions, and have rejected all policies that would substantively address the crisis, as part of broader pro-business policies advancing the interests of the ruling class as a whole.

This is not merely a historical question. Across the country, Labor governments are continuing the offensive. In Queensland, the Labor government has passed successive laws, based on the suspension of the state’s human rights act, that provide ever greater powers to indefinitely lock up children accused of crimes, the majority of them indigenous.

More broadly, the Albanese’s federal Labor government is presiding over an unprecedented onslaught on the social and living conditions of the entire working class. It is pressing ahead with massive tax cuts for the rich and pouring hundreds of billions into the military in preparation for war with China, while opposing any measures to address the worst cost of living crisis in decades. Labor’s budgets have included sweeping attacks to healthcare, education and other social necessities.

Albanese was followed by two indigenous bureaucrats. One of them, Tanya Hosch, has been widely described in the press as an “activist.” In fact Hosch has a long career in political and corporate circles. This has included senior advisory positions at the massive mining corporation BHP, the National Australia Bank and the Australian Football League.

Hosch pointed to indices of social crisis among indigenous people, including horrendous life expectancy and health outcomes, widespread unemployment and poverty. But like Albanese, she was unable to explain how the establishment of yet another advisory body, composed of wealthy indigenous leaders, would address any of them.

The other speaker was Professor Megan Davis, the co-chair of the Uluru Dialogue. Davis, who has worked closely with successive governments, summed up the essentially right-wing character of those advocating the Voice.

Davis declared: “Our constitution has done a pretty good job for most Australians.” She added: “Constitutions create the material conditions that allow populations and communities to flourish. This is why they are so important.” Davis is on a different planet to ordinary people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike. Far from a general flourishing, workers face a

worsening social crisis.

Davis pointed to the real motivations when she repeatedly declared: “We want a seat at the table.” That is, the indigenous elite for which she speaks wants to be integrated, even more closely, into the corridors of power to advance their own narrow and grasping interests.

South Australian Labor Premier Peter Malinauskas delivered a demagogic speech that outdid all the other speakers in brazen lies. Australia, he asserted, was a country based on “egalitarianism,” a tradition that the Labor Party had consistently advanced.

Malinauskas’ apparently longstanding support for “egalitarianism” began as an official for the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association (SDA). The right-wing Catholic union is notorious for its sweetheart deals with corporations, including some that violated the law by secretly slashing the wages of the lowest paid workers in the country.

Malinauskas has only been premier for little over a year. In that time, his government has ended all COVID safety measures, letting the virus rip in the interests of corporate profit, and has passed draconian legislation which civil liberties groups warn could be used to ban all public protests and campaigns. The laws were particularly called for by the mining giants. Malinauskas, like all the state and territory Labor leaders, is hostile to any pay rises in line with, let alone above inflation.

The setting of the event, moreover, belied Malinauskas’ claims about Labor’s record. The rally was held in the Adelaide suburb of Elizabeth. Formerly a centre of the automotive industry, it has been devastated by the closure of the country’s entire car industry. Successive governments, including Labor administrations, and the union movement, provided the auto companies with massive subsidies, while assisting in the dissemination of conditions, the destruction of jobs and the eventual shutdown.

The location was likely selected, because polling has indicated that support for the Voice is particularly low in working class and low-income areas. That is not a result of widespread right-wing sentiments. Instead, it reflects a sense that the proposal will do nothing to address the plight of indigenous people, and a widespread suspicion of, and hostility to, the big business governments pushing the policy.



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