

# Discredited ex-Australian PM quits, but Labor government deepens his attacks

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Having led his increasingly hated Liberal-National Coalition government to a disastrous election defeat in May 2022, former Prime Minister Scott Morrison this week announced his belated resignation from parliament, to take effect at the end of February.

The corporate, political and media establishment generally welcomed Morrison's departure, saying it "cleared the air" for the Coalition to try to regain the legions of votes it lost in 2022, especially in its previous heartland affluent electorates.

Nevertheless, the announcement points to a deepening fragility of the entire official political system. Support for both the two main ruling parties fell to near-record lows in the 2022 election, and media polls indicate a further worsening since.

That is the result of intensifying involvement in US-led wars and war preparations, and the cost-of-living crisis, on top of decades of attacks by the corporate elite and successive governments, both Labor and Coalition, on working-class jobs and social conditions.

Notably, the current Labor Party Prime Minister Anthony Albanese phoned Morrison personally to wish him well. That was after Morrison said he would take up posts in strategic and defence firms with ex-US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and former Trump security adviser Robert O'Brien, both key right-wing figures in Washington's plans for war against China.

The truth is that Morrison, who held the prime ministership for nearly four years after ousting his Liberal Party predecessor Malcolm Turnbull, had become a widely detested figure. He was a spent force politically long before the May 2022 election debacle. It was only the ensuing collapse of the traditional Coalition vote that enabled the Labor Party to scrape back into office after itself obtaining less than a third of the national vote.

In its own way, Albanese's best wishes for Morrison point to the reality being smothered in all the corporate media coverage. The Labor government has continued, and escalated, the major features of Morrison's policies—from

the AUKUS military pact against China to the persecution of refugees and the slashing of health, disability and other social spending.

Morrison was notorious for his pro-US denunciations of China. For all the pretence of mending trade relations with China, the Albanese government has gone further. Above all, it has stepped up the commitment to the AUKUS alliance, initially joined by Morrison in 2021. It has allocated at least \$368 billion over the coming decades to acquire nuclear-powered submarines, hyper-sonic missiles and other weaponry to attack China, agreed to greater US access to strategic military bases across Australia, and bullied Pacific island states to line up behind the US.

The Labor government has further displayed its commitment to US militarism by joining in the US-NATO wars in Ukraine and Yemen, and giving full-throated support to the Israeli genocide in Gaza. Labor's Defence Strategic Review last year called for the development of an "all-of-nation" war economy.

Labor has maintained another of the Coalition's signature policies—the militarised Operation Sovereign Borders, first unleashed under Morrison as immigration minister in 2013, to repel refugee boats behind a total veil of secrecy.

The Albanese government has recommenced the barbaric incarceration of asylum-seekers on remote Pacific islands. It reopened the previously mothballed detention camp on the tiny remote island of Nauru last September, imprisoning people there for the first time in nine months and then removing them to the countries they fled, contrary to the international law principle of non-refoulement.

Domestically, the Labor government has gone beyond the Coalition, carrying out attacks on working-class conditions that Morrison proved incapable of pursuing. It has suppressed workers' real wages by the greatest amount in decades, with the help of the trade union bureaucrats, and imposed the burden of the global inflationary spiral, including by backing 12 interest rate hikes by the Reserve Bank.

While blaming the Morrison government for the Robodebt

scandal, in which at least 433,000 welfare recipients were illegally hounded, traumatised and financially punished, and for eroding the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), Labor has continued that offensive.

Welfare recipients are still being accused of robbing the social security system, under the less-automated “income averaging” regime imposed by the previous Rudd-Gillard Labor governments. The NDIS has been targeted for billions of dollars in cuts over the coming years.

With public schools and hospitals already at breaking point, with mass understaffing and infrastructure failures, Labor’s May 2023 budget cut education funding in real terms and slashed the annual health budget by \$11 billion, including by further dismantling measures to cope with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Likewise, while Morrison was reviled for his government’s failures to protect the population from the catastrophic 2019?20 bushfires and the early 2022 flood disasters, those affected are still being left to fend for themselves, as are the victims of the frequent further extreme weather events.

Nor has any real action been taken on the underlying climate change. Morrison may have waved a lump of coal in parliament as a gesture of support for the fossil fuel industries, but the federal, state and territory Labor governments, currently in office across the country, have approved new high-emission gas projects, both onshore and offshore.

Far more people have suffered COVID illnesses and deaths under the Labor government than under Morrison. More than 13,000 deaths were recorded in the government’s first year alone, compared with just over 8,000 in the preceding 26 months. Today, newer highly infectious variants of the coronavirus are spreading unchecked.

That is the result of Labor’s demolition of the most basic measures to stop the spread of the virus, including testing clinics, mask mandates, vaccine mandates, and testing and reporting requirements. Last month, the government even shut down the National Coronavirus Helpline, which had been fielding roughly 130 calls a day from people seeking assistance.

As under Morrison, the preoccupation in the ruling class has been to mislead the public about the dire threat to health and lives, while preventing any restrictions that would affect business profits. The overriding concern remains to stifle and suppress opposition by workers and health professionals as the virus mutates.

Moreover, Labor has kept imposing such measures via the “National Cabinet,” an extra-constitutional virtual de facto coalition government of federal, state and territory leaders. Similarly, it has insisted on retaining the unfettered war-

making powers of the National Security Committee of Cabinet, a cabal of key government ministers, top military and intelligence officers, and senior departmental officials.

At the same time, the Labor government buried as quickly as possible the revelations that Morrison’s government had turned in an authoritarian direction, with Morrison covertly taking control of five crucial cabinet posts, as well as his own, as the pandemic erupted.

After the political pantomime of passing a token censure motion against Morrison in the House of Representatives in November 2022, Albanese and his ministers dropped all mention of the affair. That is because it showed how quickly the ruling class resorted to extra-parliamentary forms of rule as soon as the pandemic hit, fearing social unrest. The entire development was dismissed as the product of one man, Morrison, seemingly a megalomaniac.

For all the Labor government’s feigned outrage at the Morrison government’s “culture of secrecy,” it has kept the National Cabinet and National Security Committee of Cabinet, as well as Operation Sovereign Borders, shielded from public scrutiny.

Labor is thus keeping intact the potentially dictatorial powers of the state apparatus as it allows the pandemic to keep destroying 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.

Morrison’s departure underscores the reliance of the capitalist class on the Labor governments to enforce this agenda, backed by the union bosses. This is producing mounting discontent throughout the working class, however, and that is deepening the crisis of rule left by the Morrison government’s implosion.



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