

# Queensland state election points to deepening political crisis in Australia

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Voters in Australia's northern state of Queensland are going to the polls for this Saturday's state election under conditions of the worst social and housing crisis in decades and escalating US-led wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, both backed by the federal Labor government.

The state Labor government of Premier Steven Miles is set to lose heavily to the Liberal National Party (LNP) led by David Crisafulli. This is an indication of the political tumult likely at the next federal election, which must be held by May 2025.

In office since 2015, the fate of Queensland Labor's pro-business administration could prefigure that of the federal Labor government led by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. Media polls, as limited as they are, indicate that the excruciating cost-of-living for working-class households is the main issue at both state and federal levels.

Like their federal counterparts, the state Labor leaders are totally committed to backing the US-armed Israel onslaught on Gaza, Lebanon and Iran, the US-NATO war against Russia and intensifying confrontation with China, which involves massive military spending and growing US access to bases in northern Australia, including Queensland.

This plunge into barbarism and war, potentially involving a nuclear conflagration, has been buried by the political and media establishment throughout the state election campaign.

Instead, the campaign has been characterised by a rightward shift by both Labor and the LNP, featuring efforts to divert concern over the social conditions into a punitive "law and order" crusade against working-class youth, based on a largely fictional crime wave, and other threatened attacks on democratic rights, including abortion.

For months Labor has been trailing the LNP in the corporate media polls, with Labor's primary vote estimated at 27-30 percent, as much as 15 percentage points less than the LNP. That could produce an electoral landslide against Labor, including in longstanding "safe" Labor electorates in working-class areas.

But the results do not indicate any popular shift to the right, rather an underlying political disaffection. A recent Freshwater Strategy poll in the Nine media outlets recorded Labor's primary vote at 30 percent—down 9.6 points from the 2020 state election—but the LNP on only 43 percent.

The Greens, who have postured as defenders of tenants facing soaring rents, were up 2.5 points to 12 percent, while Senator Pauline Hanson's far-right One Nation Party was up just 0.9 points to 8 percent.

A recent YouGov poll commissioned by the Murdoch media's *Courier Mail* reported no greater enthusiasm for the LNP's Crisafulli, who had a 37 percent approval rating, than for Labor's Miles, who was on 36 percent.

Miles was installed as premier last December via a backroom coup in which his increasingly unpopular predecessor, Anastacia Palaszczuk, was pushed out by the factional powerbrokers and trade union bureaucrats who control the Labor Party. It was a desperate bid to avert electoral disaster.

Palaszczuk's government had won the 2020 state election due to the limited measures it took to prevent the spread of COVID within state borders in 2020?2021. Once the election was over, Labor soon adopted the "let-it-rip" policies of the then federal Liberal-National Coalition government and other states and countries. It allowed the pandemic to spread from December 2021, with at least 3,700 dead and nearly 2 million infected at least once in Queensland.

Since becoming premier, Miles has engaged in a damage-control operation, offering limited and wholly inadequate measures such as short-term rebates to utilities bills and discounted public transport to address the cost-of-living crisis caused by corporate profiteering.

At the same time, in its June budget, the Miles government pledged \$107 billion for infrastructure projects largely favouring mining and other big business interests, along with large increases for the police and prisons.

In the weeks before the election, Miles and Labor ramped up their phony pledges, vaguely promising free lunches to primary school students and some increased spending on the chronically under-funded public health system.

Such measures have not convinced the public. In March, Labor suffered drastic falls in state by-elections in the long-held working-class seats of Inala and Ipswich West. Inala, which had been held by Palaszczuk, saw a fall of 30 percent in primary votes for Labor, the largest swing since 2012, when Labor was last voted out of office.

But the LNP, which held office under Premier Campbell

Newman from 2012 to 2015, remains widely detested for its cuts to social services, including layoffs of 11,000 health workers, and privatization of \$11 billion in public infrastructure.

The hostility to the LNP allowed Labor, which had been in office since 1998 and then routed in 2012 for its own pro-business measures and layoffs, to return to office under Palaszczuk in 2015.

While promising to overturn Newman's attacks on the working class, Labor has done nothing of the sort in office since 2015. Instead, it has presided over growing crises in housing, healthcare and social services, while maintaining effective wage freezes for essential public workers relative to inflation.

A report published last month by the Queensland Council on Social Services on living affordability for vulnerable working-class households, such as single parent families and pensioners, indicated that only 40 percent could make basic ends meet, with a record 23 percent of households facing food insecurity.

The ongoing running down of public housing has led to over 43,000 applicants waiting for a public home as of January. There are over 20,000 people homeless in the state, an increase of 22 percent since 2017, three times the national average rise. Rental costs have increased 30 percent in Brisbane, the state capital, since 2020.

Years of stagnant funding for public healthcare have left Queensland hospitals starved of bed capacity and with chronic staff shortages. Queensland has failed to meet national targets for ambulance ramping for over seven years, according to the Australian Medical Association Queensland. Over 45 percent of patients waited more than 30 minutes in ambulances as of March, a record high.

Labor has responded to the social crisis by joining the LNP and the corporate media in an hysterical and brutal law-and-order campaign. Last year, Labor twice suspended the state's Human Rights Act to remove limits on holding children in adult detention centres. A disproportionate number of those affected are indigenous youth.

Despite rates of crime falling nearly 7 percent in the past year, Labor committed to funding an additional 900 police officers, bringing the total number to nearly 19,000 in a state of 5.5 million people.

Not to be outdone, the LNP has gone further, vowing to punish juvenile offenders as adults. At its official campaign launch last Saturday, the LNP declared it would impose minimum periods of isolation—that is, solitary confinement—on youth who allegedly assault prison staff.

Queensland Labor has also backed the Albanese government's dictatorial takeover of the Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU) through unproven allegations of corruption—a major attack on the democratic rights of construction workers, aimed at slashing their wages and conditions.

Albanese has largely stayed away from Queensland for weeks to try to distance his government from Labor's looming defeat in the state. But the national scale of the discontent with Labor's program of war and austerity was underscored by the landslide defeat of the Northern Territory Labor government in August.

Last Saturday too, Labor suffered a 3.3 percentage point swing against it in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) elections. Despite its vote falling to 34.5 percent, Labor is likely to cling to office in the ACT, which covers Canberra, the national capital, via a formal, or informal coalition with the Greens, as it has for the past 23 years.

That is because the Liberal vote also fell, by 0.7 percent to 33 percent. Having propped up the pro-business and pro-war Labor Party for years, the Greens lost two of their five ACT assembly seats to nominal independents.

There is anxiety in the ruling elite and the corporate media that broad sections of the working class are turning against Labor, long the party responsible for preventing an independent struggle by the working class against capitalism.

Radicalised by the increasing barbarism of this system, expressed most sharply in the genocide in Gaza and deteriorating living and working conditions, hostility against the entire political apparatus is developing.

However, no matter which party takes office after the Queensland election, or the federal election, the result will be an intensification of the attacks against the social conditions of the working class.

An editorial yesterday in the Murdoch media's *Australian* criticised the LNP for adopting a so-called small target approach to get into office in Queensland, instead of promising to slash social spending to cut government debt, which it said would climb to \$172 billion over the next four years. If the LNP took office, "that must change," the editorial insisted.

There is only one alternative for the working class. During its campaign to win 1,500 electoral members, the Socialist Equality Party demonstrated that workers and youth are searching for a genuine, revolutionary answer to capitalism, and the wars and destitution it produces. Joining with their class brothers and sisters internationally in the struggle against capitalism is the only progressive solution.



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