

# The Australian election, global opposition to Trump and the need for a socialist perspective

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Saturday's Australian federal election confirmed a developing global pattern: To the extent that masses of people around the world are becoming aware of the threat posed by fascistic US President Donald Trump and his program of economic war, militarism and dictatorship, they want to fight it.

But it also underscored a fundamental political lesson. If such sentiments remain trapped within the framework of capitalist parliamentary politics, a population that repudiates Trump-style policies through the ballot box will nevertheless be confronted with a big-business government, no less committed to an agenda of war and austerity.

The Australian election outcome defied more than a year of polls and all official predictions. They had forecast that neither of the major parties would win a clear victory, and they would have to cobble together a minority government. Instead, the right-wing Liberal-National Coalition suffered a complete rout, and the Labor Party secured a clear majority government.

Already, there is an attempt in the political and media establishment to cover up the cause, with claims of a masterful campaign by Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. In reality, it is clear that there was one overriding factor that determined the result: When millions of working people looked at the Coalition and its leader, Peter Dutton, they saw Trump.

The result is strikingly similar to that of the Canadian election, held a week before. In that poll too, the Conservatives and their leader Pierre Poilievre were roundly defeated by the incumbent Liberals, against expectations, above all due to an identification with Trump.

The parallel between developments in Canada and Australia, on the other side of the world, expresses an emerging understanding among working people that the issues they confront are determined by international processes, epitomised by the coming to power of a fascistic government in the US, the centre of world capitalism.

That developing recognition is all the more notable in the case of the Australian election, given that the official campaign, by Labor, the Coalition and the media, was a desperate attempt to promote national exceptionalism and to bury any discussion of the massive global crisis. But, try as the political establishment might, that global crisis had a decisive impact.

In the lead-up to the election, Dutton had hailed Trump as a

“big thinker and deal maker.” The Coalition leader had declared that he would be best placed to work with Trump because of a shared ideological affinity. Both were “strong leaders.”

Dutton unveiled several Trump-like policies, including a pledge to establish a Department of Government Efficiency, directly modelled on Trump and Elon Musk's wrecking operation against social programs in the US. This was to include the sacking of 41,000 federal public sector workers.

In the course of the campaign, however, Dutton was compelled to withdraw the policy, after a major public backlash. Other Trumpian policies that had been foreshadowed in the press were either never announced, or were not spoken of by the Coalition. By the end of the campaign, Dutton was desperately trying to distance himself from Trump, noting repeatedly that they had never met or spoken. But the damage had been done.

Labor sought to capitalise on the sentiment, presenting Dutton as an “aggressive” figure who would “Americanise” the crisis-ridden public healthcare system and be “erratic” on questions of foreign policy. While refusing to mention Trump, much less criticise him, the allusion the Laborites were making was clear.

Mass anti-Trump sentiment intersected with and deepened a protracted crisis of the Coalition, one of the two parties of post-World War II capitalist rule. It is now in a state of collapse. That reflects the absence of a mass constituency for its increasing lurch towards right-wing populism, and the collapse of a broader middle-class base for traditional conservative politics amid soaring social inequality.

As with the Canadian election, the result is of significance. It points to a developing shift to the left among the population and a desire to fight Trumpism, which includes growing mass hostility to his administration within the US itself.

However, both elections have underscored a crisis of political perspective in the working class. If workers remain subordinated to the traditional capitalist outfits, whether the Liberals in Canada or Labor in Australia, their attempt to reject Trump-style policies results in no change whatsoever. They are confronted with right-wing governments that will pursue reactionary policies, similar to those of the Trump

administration itself.

That is because Trump's program does not result from individual or national peculiarities. It is simply the sharpest expression of the response of the ruling classes to the breakdown of global capitalism. All imperialist powers are seeking to offset their own crisis through militarism and war abroad, a war against the social conditions of the working class and a lurch to authoritarianism to suppress popular opposition at home.

The incoming Labor government's commitment to that program is crystal clear. Having been re-elected on the basis of an anti-Trump vote, one of Albanese's first acts was to call Trump to pledge close collaboration. The two publicly exchanged mutual pleasantries, with Albanese describing the conversation as "very warm" and Trump stating, "The man that won, he's very good. He's a friend of mine."

Albanese said the conversation had been about "trade," i.e., his government's desperate attempts to secure an exemption from Trump's tariffs, and AUKUS—the militarist anti-China pact involving Australia, the US and the UK.

Under its auspices, Albanese, in Labor's first term, completed Australia's transformation into a frontline state for war with China, including through a massive expansion of US basing arrangements, a major military build-up and the finalisation of plans for Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines.

Speaking to Trump about AUKUS was his first order of business, signalling that Labor will only accelerate the war drive in its second term. It will include a further increase in military spending, with the national security establishment clamouring for tens of billions of dollars to be committed on top of the already record defence budget.

More broadly, Albanese's discussion was a reaffirmation of his government's commitment to US-led war globally, including the genocide in Gaza, where Trump and Israel are now seeking to complete the total ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians.

Treasurer Jim Chalmers set out the other prong of Labor's program. Based on a slight reduction to the headline interest rate, Labor would move away from supposedly combatting inflation and instead focus on "productivity." In other words, even the miserly cost-of-living policies of the past three years, during which Labor inflicted the biggest reversal to working-class living standards in decades, are a thing of the past. Instead, "productivity," a code word for intensified exploitation of the working class, is the order of the day.

This is a Labor government on a collision course with the working class. Notwithstanding its victory, Labor's primary vote remained near historic lows at less than 35 percent of the electorate. More fundamentally, after decades of enforcing the dictates of the corporate elite, its erstwhile mass base of support in the working class no longer exists.

It is a government that will be completely dependent on the

political fraud that is the official "left." That includes the union bureaucracy, which oversaw massive cuts to wages and conditions amid the inflation crisis, and is committed to suppressing strikes and all other forms of popular opposition.

The Greens, too, function as a prop of Labor. In the election, they campaigned for Labor's victory, on the basis of the "lesser evil" perspective of "Keep Dutton out." They begged Labor for a coalition, promoting the fraud that a new Albanese government, having spent three years attacking social conditions, would somehow usher in a "golden era" of "progressive reform." The Greens lined up with the war drive, unveiling, for the first time, their own program of missile and drone acquisitions, and largely dropped any reference to the war crimes in Gaza.

Their right-wing program did not parachute them into the corridors of power as hoped, but instead will see them lose a number of parliamentary seats.

For their part, the pseudo-left groups, such as Socialist Alliance and the Victorian Socialists, aligned themselves with the Greens as the best means of pressuring Labor. They covered up the global crisis, said virtually nothing about war and insisted that the key task was the election of Labor as a "lesser evil." In tandem with the Greens, Socialist Alliance raised their own war program of halving Labor's military budget thereby agreeing to \$28 billion to be spent on war. These right-wing formations, speaking for a privileged layer of the upper-middle class, are already peddling the lie that limited pressure could compel Labor to enact unspecified "reforms."

The election showed there is mass anger and opposition, but what is missing is an independent political movement of the working class, advancing its class interests against all of the parties of the bourgeoisie and the middle class. That is the significance of the campaign waged by the Socialist Equality Party, which alone is seeking to build such a movement.

The SEP told the truth: The election would resolve nothing for the working class, and that whichever party came to office would be committed to a predetermined agenda of war, massive military spending and an offensive against democratic rights and social conditions. Against the nationalism and exceptionalism of every other party, the SEP insisted that the global crisis would determine events in Australia.

Above all, it elaborated a socialist perspective, based on uniting the working class globally, in a fight to abolish the outmoded capitalist nation-state system, which is again plunging humanity into barbarism. All workers and young people seeking a way forward should take up that perspective and build the SEP as the new mass party of the working class.



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