

Australian pseudo-left promotes illusions in pro-business, pro-war Labor government

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The immediate response of the pseudo-left parties to last Saturday's Australian federal election has been to promote the fraud that the incoming Labor government can be pressured to the left through protest. That is the line advanced by Socialist Alternative (SAlt), which controls the Victorian Socialists (VS) electoral front, and Socialist Alliance (SA), which also stood candidates.

These organisations are covering up the reality that Labor, in its second term, will be even more reactionary than in its first.

Under conditions of a breakdown of global capitalism, the second Albanese government will be compelled to intensify the central policies it advanced over the past three years: major attacks on social conditions, a military build-up in preparation for US-led war against China and an associated crackdown on democratic rights to suppress popular opposition. What is on the agenda is not concessions through pressure, but a confrontation between the working class and a right-wing, pro-war, pro-business Labor administration.

The pseudo-left are seeking to conceal this basic political reality, because in that looming confrontation they are on the side of Labor and the government. These organisations have nothing to do with socialism or the working class, instead speaking for an affluent layer of the upper middle-class, tied by a thousand threads to Labor, including through their close connections to the corporatised trade unions and the Greens.

The post-election line of the pseudo-left is a continuation of the election campaigns of VS and SA, which centred on calls for a vote for Labor and the Greens as a "lesser evil" and bogus claims that a large vote for their candidates would "pressure" the political establishment to enact unspecified reforms.

To justify this political fraud, the pseudo-left buried any discussion of the explosive global context within which the election was being held, including the coming to power of the fascistic Trump administration in the US, the development of all-out economic war, militarism and social counter-revolution globally.

Downplaying that world reality and its direct impact on Australian political developments is at the centre of SAlt's post-election analysis. Its initial article written by Tom Bramble, posted on the *Red Flag* website Monday, made limited criticisms of Labor. The most striking element of the article is that its assessment of Labor's victory is essentially the same as that advanced by the Labor Party itself and its aligned trade union bureaucracy.

In a list of the causes of Labor's result, the impact of Trump comes a distant and last fifth place. But, as was initially acknowledged even in the corporate press, Labor's unexpected return to majority government and the rout of the opposition Liberal-National Coalition was above all a product of mass hostility to Trump, expressed in an

anti-Liberal vote.

Throughout the campaign, the Coalition and its leader Peter Dutton repeatedly withdrew Trumpian policies, after it became clear that they were deeply unpopular. Dutton desperately sought to distance himself from Trump in the final stages of the campaign, but was unable to undo the damage.

SAlt's downplaying of the Trump factor is directly connected to an attempt to bolster illusions in Labor. In this they dovetail with the desperate role of the bourgeois media and political commentators that now promote either the "audacity" of the Albanese campaign or the "chaos" of Dutton's as the reason for the unexpected result.

The very first reason for Labor's victory, advanced by Bramble, is that "there has been some relief from the squeeze in living standards because of falling inflation, increased wages, the first interest rate cut in nearly five years and the prospect that more will follow."

That list of purported advances was essentially the campaign slogan of Labor and the union bureaucracy. But it is a complete sham. While there has been a slight decline in headline inflation, the result of global trends, the real increases to the cost of essential goods over the recent period still outstrip minuscule increases in wages.

The minor reduction in official inflation does not come close to making up for the average 9 percent decline in workers' purchasing power since 2019, the sharpest reversal of any advanced economy during the inflation crisis. Only an individual, and an organisation, a million miles from the real social conditions of the working class or deliberately presenting an entirely false situation could write a statement such as that of Bramble.

For Labor and the unions, the assertions of an improvement to the social crisis are a transparent effort to cover over their own role in inflicting the massive reversal to working-class living standards. Contrary to their claims, and those of Bramble, Labor has rejected any substantial cost-of-living relief.

Similarly, Bramble claimed, in his second reason for the result, that the economy continued to grow under Labor. Again, this is a Labor Party talking point. In reality, the economy, but for population growth, has been in a recession for over a year.

By presenting this false economic scenario, Bramble is constructing a picture that essentially excludes the deepening crisis of Australian capitalism. The fact that the economy, already teetering on the brink of an official recession, will be battered by the fallout from Trump's global economic war does not rate a mention. Australia is acutely vulnerable, due to its enormous dependency on commodity exports, above all, to Beijing, Trump's central target.

The article does not mention Labor's central priority in its first term, which was to complete Australia's transformation into a

frontline state for a US-led war with China. That program, which Albanese immediately discussed with Trump himself after the election, will dominate social, economic, and political life over the coming period.

Bramble and SAlt write off these plans for a catastrophic war, the likelihood of recession and deep-going austerity to pay for both, to create the illusion that their limited proposed reforms are possible. Bramble's article concludes that the next three years will essentially be more of the same, despite the deepening shocks internationally. His only call is for people to participate in protests, and perhaps strikes, to pressure Labor for concessions.

But this is a fraud. SAlt and VS completely support the corporatised trade union bureaucracy, which functions as the key partner of the Labor government and the corporations in suppressing all industrial action by workers and imposing the dictates of the employers. Through their defence of this bureaucracy, SAlt and VS defend the Labor government.

That is true of their orientation towards the Greens as well. Bramble bemoaned the Greens' poor election result, writing that "their loss of seats is a setback for progressive politics in Australia." VS has made social media posts, commiserating with Greens leader Adam Bandt on losing his seat and similarly hailing him as a progressive figure.

In reality, despite growing political discontent, the Greens failed to increase their support because of their right-wing campaign. It centred on desperate appeals for a coalition government with Labor and an insistence that the only real task in the election was to "keep Dutton out." Under those conditions, there was no reason for broad sections of the population, hostile to Dutton, to vote Greens rather than directly for Labor itself.

In the course of the campaign, and as part of their overtures to Labor, Bandt and the Greens largely dropped their condemnations of the Israeli genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and Australia's complicity in it. They also dispensed with their pacifist posturing to outline the Greens' first costed military program for the acquisition of missiles and other offensive weaponry such as drones.

Bramble, SAlt, and VS do not mention any of this. They make clear that they consider themselves part of the same broad "progressive" movement as the Greens.

That is a continuation of the VS election campaign, which was largely modelled on the Greens. VS did not pretend to have any connection to revolutionary socialism. Its program did not even call for the nationalisation of all major banks and the expropriation of the billionaires. Instead, as with the Greens, VS advanced a grab-bag of various social measures, such as increasing public housing.

In direct opposition to a perspective of mobilising the working class against Labor and the political establishment, VS instead asserted that limited pressure on Labor and even the Liberals would result in social improvements.

That is the line that Bramble is now advancing. It is also the position of the other main pseudo-left outfit Socialist Alliance, which summed it up even more crudely than Bramble, declaring: "Working people will continue to bear the brunt of a system in crisis unless the union and social movements get organised to demand Labor use its second term to deliver on real housing affordability and other cost-of-living solutions."

VS was heavily promoted by the media during the election, running the most high-profile pseudo-left campaign in decades. That was partly based on its selection of minor social media celebrity and housing activist Jordan van den Lamb as its lead candidate. Van den

Lamb, who had no history of involvement in the socialist movement before standing for VS, simply carried on as a single-issue figure while promoting the fraud of protest politics.

Whatever hopes VS had that van den Lamb's profile would parachute them into the corridors of power, and there is no doubt such hopes existed, they did not come to fruition, with VS receiving a little under 2 percent of the Senate vote in Victoria. That means that well over 50,000 people in that state voted for candidates with the name "socialist" appearing on their ticket, indicating a growing anti-capitalist sentiment and attraction to a socialist alternative.

However, the function of the pseudo-left is to prevent such sentiments from being transformed into a genuine, revolutionary socialist movement. Their promotion of reformism, in an era when the program of the ruling elite is not reform but social counter-revolution, is aimed at chaining workers and young people to the framework of parliament and official politics.

Under conditions where the ruling elites are increasingly turning to dictatorial and authoritarian forms of rule, most sharply expressed by Trump, but present in every country, the pseudo-left presents governments and parliament as receptive to limited protests and appeals. In reality, as has been seen in Australia and throughout the imperialist countries, as masses of people have protested against the genocide in Gaza, the response of governments, including Labor, has not been to turn away from Israel, but to ferociously attack students, academics, workers and others for taking a stand against the war crimes.

The Socialist Equality Party, the Australian section of the world Trotskyist movement, told the working class the truth during the election. We warned that the poll would resolve nothing for working people, and that the incoming government's policies would be determined by the deepest crisis of capitalism since the 1930s, and the resulting demands from the ruling elite for ever-greater militarism and austerity. That reality, posing the need not for protest politics, but for revolutionary politics and a socialist and internationalist program, will become clear to broad sections of the working class over the coming period.



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