

Australian PM in the UK: Militarism and reaction cloaked with paeans to “democracy”

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Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese framed a visit to the UK over recent days as a defence of “democracy” and social progress, supposedly the cornerstones of his Labor government and its British counterpart.

Together with his “good mate,” UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Albanese vowed to stare down the forces of “division” and “resentment” and take forward the values of “fairness and justice.” That was the message he delivered to the annual conference of the British Labour Party in Liverpool on Sunday and to a gathering of social-democratic leaders billed as the “Global Progress Action Summit” days earlier.

The references, largely veiled, were to the growth of far-right and fascistic forces. The proximate cause of the preoccupation was the fact that the far right, anti-immigrant Reform Party and its leader Nigel Farage are surging in the British polls, becoming the chief opposition to Starmer’s Labour government. Albanese refused to meet with Farage, and ostentatiously praised Starmer throughout the visit.

Albanese’s presentation of his and Starmer’s governments as bulwarks against the right had about as much sincerity as is to be found in the wares of corporate advertisers. Indeed, there are almost too many examples of hypocrisy exposing the fraud of his claims to enumerate.

In the first instance was the purpose of the trip itself. Albanese’s meeting with Starmer, the central engagement of the visit, was almost exclusively dedicated to advancing militarism and war.

A statement by Albanese’s office on the visit declared: “The Prime Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to the AUKUS partnership,” their pact with the US that is the spearhead of a military build-up in the Indo-Pacific. They would press ahead with the plan to equip Australia with nuclear-powered submarines, including the joint UK-Australian construction of a new type next decade.

As is openly stated in hawkish think-tanks, the sole purpose of the submarine program is to prepare for an aggressive, US-led war against China. Australia’s staggering \$368 billion commitment to the program can only be paid for through a massive assault on social programs. None of this has any democratic mandate.

Then there was Albanese’s private discussion with former British Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair. Afterwards, Albanese was asked by the media whether he and Blair had discussed plans to establish an entity known as the Gaza International Transitional Authority that he would head. Albanese indicated that they had,

but said little more about the contents of the discussion.

The plan has been worked out by the US administration of President Donald Trump, together with Blair. It is explicitly premised on the program Trump outlined earlier this year, of expelling Gaza’s Palestinians and transforming the Strip into a US-controlled “Riviera.” That is, the authority is to be the culmination of the massive ethnic-cleansing operation that is well underway in Israel’s genocidal onslaught.

Just a week before, Albanese, Starmer and several other leaders had “recognised” a Palestinian state at a United Nations summit in New York. Could Blair play a role in “bridging” the apparent divide between that position, and Trump’s program, a journalist asked.

“Tony Blair is someone who’s always played a constructive role,” Albanese said. “He’s someone who does look for solutions. He’s someone who has been involved in the Middle East issues for some period of time, and I’m sure that he will always play a constructive role, because that’s the nature of Tony Blair.”

The statement again demonstrates that “recognition” was a cynical fraud, carried out by governments, including in the UK and Australia, that continue to diplomatically, politically and materially aid the genocide of the Palestinians. Albanese knows full well that the “solution” Blair is associated with amounts to the “final solution” for the Palestinians, recalling nothing so much as the actions of the Nazis.

Albanese did not attempt to square the idea of “democracy” with Blair, a British imperialist politician, being appointed the dictator of an ethnically cleansed Palestine on behalf of the US and Israel.

As for Blair’s involvement in “Middle East issues for some time,” it should be recalled that Blair aggressively spearheaded the lies about “weapons of mass destruction,” which led to the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, in an illegal war for oil that claimed a million lives.

Albanese’s Labor Party backed the Australian Liberal-National government in joining the criminal “coalition of the willing” with the US and Britain in invading Iraq—with the flimsy caveat that it be sanctioned by the UN. Now he is backing similar or even worse crimes in Palestine—while recognising a “state” in ruins and dominated by US imperialism and its Zionist accomplice.

The references to Trump in Albanese’s media conferences raised the elephant in the room, which he avoided in all of his prepared remarks. While vaguely gesturing about the dangers posed by the far right, Albanese and Starmer have ostentatiously fawned over

its chief international representative.

Starmer hosted Trump late last month, providing him with a “royal experience” that was attractive to the representative of the American oligarchy and its would-be dictator.

Albanese himself arrived in the UK directly from the US. There, he had desperately sought and failed to receive a one-on-one audience with Trump. In the US, and generally, Albanese has refused to criticise a single one of Trump’s policies, whether that be his climate change denial, brutal assaults on immigrants or his frothing militarist declarations.

Albanese says nothing about the fact that Trump is seeking to overturn the US Constitution. He did not mention Trump’s deployment of the military to Portland, in the latest stage of this coup against democracy.

Aside from their lockstep alliance with the US, bound up with their own respective imperialist interests, the attitude to Trump reflects the reality that the social-democratic governments in Britain and Australia are carrying out a similar assault on democratic rights.

Starmer has illegalised the peaceful Palestine Action group as a terrorist organisation, and has overseen the mass arrests and attempted prosecution of hundreds of people for holding up signs opposing the proscription. Albanese has overseen an offensive against mass opposition to the genocide in Australia, that has included repeated attempts by state Labor administrations to ban protests and the passage of “hate speech” legislation aimed at outlawing strident condemnations of Zionism.

In that context, Albanese’s speech to the UK Labour conference was most striking for the absence of any real content in its references to “democracy.” Albanese proclaimed “an absolute resolve to stand together and defend democracy itself,” but what that “democracy” consisted of, he did not say.

It boiled down to the fact that Australia and the UK continue to hold parliamentary elections, but even there, Albanese blurted out his anti-democratic impulses, complaining of the shortness of the three-year term of government in Australia.

Albanese referenced limited social reforms by social-democratic governments in the post-World War II period and into the 1970s, which were always aimed at heading off a revolutionary struggle by the working class. But he also hailed the turn to “aspiration” represented by Blair’s government and those of Bob Hawke and Paul Keating in Australia, which inflicted a Thatcherite assault on jobs, wages, working conditions and social services.

While speaking of “fairness and justice,” Albanese could not point to a single progressive social policy carried out by either his or Starmer’s governments.

Starmer is widely reviled as a representative of the rich, whose government’s attitude to the poor was summed up by a major cut to the winter fuel allowance, literally condemning impoverished pensioners to freeze. Albanese spoke about the importance of jobs and wage rises, but amid the global inflation crisis his government has presided over the greatest fall in workers’ average purchasing power of an advanced OECD country.

Albanese was left to pathetically present the AUKUS submarine acquisition plan as a job creation program. Leaving aside the fact that it is a preparation for a war with China that would be the most

destructive in human history, even the Australian government’s own estimate is that only around 20,000 jobs will be created in Australia in the course of more than 30 years.

In a speech nominally directed against the right, Albanese did not mention their central pitch, demagoguery against immigrants. That was hardly an accident, given that Starmer has declared combatting immigration to be his number one priority, and Albanese is continuing the record of Australia setting a precedent for the global assault on immigrants, including by confining them to concentration camp-style prisons on impoverished Pacific Islands.

Albanese did, however, declare that “to build cohesion, respect and harmony at home ... We do that by embracing patriotism as a truly progressive cause.”

The “progressive patriotism” of which Albanese has repeatedly spoken this year is rank nationalism dressed up with the meaningless word “progressive.” It is a promotion of Australian nationalism, to justify militarism abroad, to suppress anti-war opposition and to cover over the class gulf in society.

The references to “cohesion” serve the same ends. For two years, people have been demonised by the government for threatening “social cohesion” for opposing a genocide that the Albanese government is supporting.

The social-democratic parties, which have transformed into the unalloyed instruments of the corporate elite, play the indispensable role in promoting the far right, both by legitimising attacks on immigrants and refugees, stoking nationalism and militarism and fuelling a social crisis that far-right demagogues can make a pitch to.

The reality was summed up more than a hundred years ago by the Russian revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin, when he explained that in the epoch of imperialism, the final stage of capitalism, “The difference between the democratic-republican and the reactionary-monarchist imperialist bourgeoisie is obliterated precisely because they are both rotting alive.”



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