

Australian Labor government spearheads assault on immigrants

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Thousands of immigrant workers, branded as visa overstayers, will face raids on their homes and workplaces, imprisonment and deportation under the Albanese Labor government's anti-immigrant measures, unveiled by Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke this week.

Under the government's plan, 100 additional Border Force "compliance officers" will be recruited, boosting the total to about 300, to hunt down supposed visa "overstayers." About 250 extra detention beds will be opened immediately near airports and the government will repurpose a mothballed 1,000-capacity COVID quarantine facility in Melbourne to provide for mass detentions and deportations.

The most immediate target will be almost 80,000 people, mostly workers and students, who have allegedly overstayed their temporary visas. That alone will involve a massive deportation program, but that is just the start.

The dragnet will inevitably widen to as many as half a million temporary visa holders as the government also moves to stop them from "visa-hopping," that is, applying for alternative visas. This will create a police-state atmosphere of raids and arrests in working-class areas.

Those most vulnerable include the 432,000 people who were on bridging visas as of March this year, which allow people to remain in Australia lawfully while their visa applications or appeals against decisions are heard, and the 93,000 asylum seekers refused visas and still living in the community as of February.

Burke's speech at the National Press Club on Thursday underscores the reality that when it comes to blaming immigrant workers and students for the worsening cost-of-living, fuel and housing crisis there are no real differences between the Labor Party and the far-right anti-immigrant One Nation or the Liberal-National Coalition, all of which are vying to outdo each other in slashing immigration.

Labor is intent on spearheading this offensive despite the widespread revulsion to immigration police raids, as seen in the mass opposition to the dawn raid and imprisonment of a Sri Lankan family in the rural town of Biloela in 2018, and in the reaction to the Trump administration's brutal

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids, incarcerations and deportations.

Burke claimed: "This is not the sort of operation that some people have seen on TV happening in other countries."

But the scale of the government's plan demonstrates that it cannot be achieved without similar scenes. Nearly three million people are on insecure temporary visas, many working in poor conditions in industries such as agriculture, health care, aged care, hospitality, fast food and deliveries.

Labor's crackdown only diverges from One Nation's vow, issued this week, to remove 750,000 people from the country over three years by Labor ensuring that employers in selected industries, particularly in rural and regional areas, have access to the cheap labour and exploitative conditions provided by temporary visas, including Working Holiday Maker visas for young tourists.

To qualify for ballots to stay in the country for more than one year, young tourists will still have to perform "specified work" for 88 days, mainly in agricultural industries, and for six months to stay for a third year. This entails exposing them to working 10- to 12-hour days for poverty wages, overcrowded and dilapidated accommodation and near-total control by labour-hire contractors over every aspect of their lives.

While the ballots will reduce the numbers available to employers in the second and third years—to 45,000 places in the second year and 5,000 in the third—the government exempted young British tourists from the new regime, ensuring a plentiful supply of low-cost labour.

Burke also announced that a ministerial decree in July, Ministerial Direction 119, would be changed to give processing priority for employer-sponsored visas for construction, healthcare, agriculture, fisheries and teaching after a business backlash to his earlier decision to force overseas applicants to wait much longer.

Among Labor's measures, a "No Further Stays" provision will prevent people arriving on temporary visas and then lodging new visa applications, including for asylum. Most international students will be barred from bringing family

members with them, splitting families and creating real hardship, and from applying for further study visas, except for higher degrees or qualifications.

The Albanese government already has significantly cut the numbers of international students, down by 7 percent over the past year alone, including by raising students visa fees to the highest in the world—up to \$2,500. This is deliberately adding to the under-funding of universities, which have been forced to rely on charging international students exorbitant fees to cover about a quarter to a third of their revenues.

Labor’s latest plan necessarily involves dramatically escalating the scale and pace of removals, which are already occurring. According to the most recent Home Affairs migration trends report, there were 6,646 compulsory departures in the 2024–25 financial year, with about half being “voluntary” returns after being detected and half being removals after detention.

Burke said the government would clamp down on “visa hopping” where people “exploited” the visa system and appeals process to remain in Australia while their appeals against visa rejections were heard.

In fact, Labor wants to abolish tribunal appeal rights altogether, via legislation, overturning basic legal and democratic rights. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese held at least two backroom meetings with Coalition leader Angus Taylor in recent weeks to forge a bipartisan front on such draconian legislation, but the talks apparently broke down because Labor and the Coalition are competing to outflank One Nation.

Without providing any details, Burke said the government would also need to legislate to stop people making “disingenuous” asylum claims to extend their time in Australia. This would mean further eviscerating the right, under the 1951 Refugee Convention, to seek protection from persecution, harm or death. Burke said he hoped to continue negotiations with the Coalition on such legislative changes.

This is of a piece with the Albanese government’s incarceration of asylum seekers and ex-immigration detainees on the remote Pacific island of Nauru (recently renamed Naoero).

Burke boasted that the government had already driven down net overseas migration by nearly 50 percent to 292,000 net arrivals over the year to March 2026. But that remains well above the federal government’s targets of 245,000 for 2026–27 and 225,000 for 2027–28, which he vowed to achieve.

Burke said the government was on track to have 700,000 fewer people in the country in 2030–31 than had been forecast prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. That virtually matches One Nation’s pledge to remove 750,000 people over the next three years.

These measures are an attack on the working class as a whole. Stripping work rights away from workers or students will push them into the black economy of especially unsafe, precarious and exploitative employment, undercutting the conditions of all workers.

As refugee and human rights organisations have protested, studies have shown that undocumented workers face the worst forms of exploitation and are least likely to speak up about it, for fear of detection and deportation. Employers often take control of their workers’ visa status, rendering them undocumented in order to continue their exploitation.

This offensive marks a sharp turn by the Labor government to make immigrants scapegoats for the deteriorating social conditions confronting working-class households, intensified by the renewed global inflationary impact of the criminal US-Israeli war on Iran, which the Albanese government has backed from day one.

With Labor’s opinion poll ratings falling to historic lows of less than 30 percent, the Albanese government is seeking to outdo Senator Pauline Hanson’s One Nation in punishing migrant workers, international students and asylum seekers. This is a diversion from the underlying roots of the declining living standards, which lie in the capitalist profit system itself, enforced by the Labor government.

From the US to Europe, governments of all political stripes are pursuing anti-immigrant witch hunting to channel mounting working-class anger over soaring social inequality, falling housing unaffordability, cuts to social programs and the funnelling of billions into military spending, toward the most vulnerable members of society.

This aims to divide the working class—which in Australia is truly international, with nearly half the population having a parent born overseas and figures reaching two-thirds in major working-class areas—along national and ethnic lines under conditions of an unfolding world war and Labor’s growing integration of Australia into US plans for war against China.



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