

Last-ditch Australian Coalition and Labor campaign “rallies”: More desperate lies

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Twin events held by the Liberal-National Coalition and the Labor Party in Brisbane last Sunday, attended by a few hundred party supporters, took to a new low the spruiking of bald-faced lies.

More than anything else, the official Liberal Party election launch—held just six days before the May 21 vote—and Labor’s nearby rival “campaign rally” underscored the deepening crisis of the increasingly detested two-party system of rule on which the Australian capitalist class has relied for more than a century. The “choice” between them is no choice at all.

One reason the launch was held less than a week from election day was to ensure that the Liberal Party campaign was substantially state-funded for as long as possible. Once a campaign launch is conducted the party itself has to pay for its election campaign. Likewise, the Greens held their launch on Monday—five days out—and Labor the week before.

If one were to believe Coalition Prime Minister Scott Morrison or Labor leader Anthony Albanese, Australia somehow faces a “better future.” There will be opportunity and prosperity for all, despite a soaring cost of living, falling real wages, worsening COVID-19 infections and deaths, climate disasters and US-led wars being triggered in Europe and the Indo-Pacific against Russia and China.

In reality, as the content of their speeches actually indicated, regardless of whether the Coalition or Labor forms the next government—and whether it is a majority administration or a minority government, resting on the support of Greens and “independents”—it will intensify the offensive against the social conditions of the working class, and place the population even further on the frontline of catastrophic wars to seek to reassert US global hegemony.

With polls pointing to a “hung parliament” or a Labor victory, and widespread hostility to Morrison, he offered what media commentators called “a last throw of the dice.” He told a room of 350 party faithful that he could “change” for the better, shift to an “extra gear” and move Australia to a “new era of opportunity” if voters backed him on Saturday.

Morrison declared that the pandemic was in the past, and “better days are ahead,” based on a “strong economy.” This was no more believable than his claims about his government’s record: “On almost every measure, growth, jobs, debt levels,

fatality rates, vaccine rates, Australia’s recovery is leading the advanced world.”

What a fraud! First, Australia now has the highest COVID-19 infection rate, per person, in the world (except for several tiny states) and deaths are rising. As Morrison spoke, Australia had a total of 7,794 COVID deaths, some 5,555 of them in this year alone, with 246 in the previous week.

This is because every government, federal, state and territory, Coalition and Labor alike, has scrapped virtually every essential safety measure since December, for the sake of corporate profit. That was after nearly two years of these governments being forced by workers’ walkouts, public pressure and medical advice to maintain limited, but partially successful, suppression programs.

Second, the only jobs created by this “live with the virus” offensive have been low-wage, insecure and casualised, especially for young workers in the “gig economy.”

That is why Morrison has vehemently opposed any increase in the minimum wage to match inflation, and why Albanese has backtracked on any such suggestion as well. Both agree on leaving any pay rise, even for those trying to survive on \$20.33 an hour, up to the pro-business Fair Work Commission set up by the last Labor government.

Morrison’s “last throw of the dice” featured two announcements. One was a plan to allow first-homebuyers to withdraw up to \$50,000, or 40 percent, of their superannuation funds to get into the property market. This is a blatant effort to pour more money into the market to boost house prices, which are already unaffordable for the majority of young working-class people, for the benefit of wealthier layers of society.

Far from being a “game changer,” as Morrison ridiculously declared, the scheme will only worsen the housing crisis for young people. Many have had to pull money out of superannuation during the pandemic and will not have the more than \$120,000 in their account needed to qualify.

Morrison’s only other significant announcement was to spend another \$454 million buying seven extra airforce “Ghost Bat” drones. He promoted these as “next generation stealth, unmanned aerial vehicles, leveraging artificial intelligence, to support manned aircraft to conduct air combat, reconnaissance and surveillance missions.”

That adds to the more than \$600 billion already pledged for the military over the decade, as part of the plans for joining a US war against China. Morrison hailed Defence Minister Peter Dutton for “revolutionising our defence force.” Dutton recently declared that the country must “prepare for war.”

Albanese’s speech to Labor’s rally was no less cynical. He endlessly repeated variations of the party’s slogan of “a better future.” At the same time, he again pitched Labor to the corporate elite as the only party able to work with big business and the trade unions to impose the further restructuring of workplace conditions required to drive up profits.

Albanese told the gathering of supporters that employment would increase, productivity would go up and the cost of living would go down under Labor. This was an underhanded version of his written speech, circulated to the corporate media before the event, which said: “Jobs up. Profits up. Cost of living down.”

As the written version exposes, boosting “productivity” means fuelling employer profits at the expense of workers’ jobs, wages and conditions. Far from generating higher wages, as Labor pretends, this means widening the gap between stagnant wages and soaring output per worker that has grown since the 1990s.

That gulf is the result of the pro-market restructuring implemented by the Hawke and Keating Labor governments of 1983 to 1996. The restructuring was enforced by the unions, via Price and Income Accords and the enterprise bargaining system, which outlaws almost all strikes, shackling workers for the past three decades.

Since being installed as Labor leader following the party’s debacle at the 2019 election, Albanese promises to take that government-business-union partnership to a new level. He said a Labor government “would strive to bring workers and employers together to find common ground and common interests.”

The truth is that means further subordinating workers’ interests to those of the employers and the ruling class as a whole.

Interviewed on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s “Insiders” TV program before the campaign rally, Albanese gave a parallel pledge to cut social spending to pay off the more than \$1 trillion in government debt incurred by bailing out the corporate elite and financial markets in the first two years of the pandemic.

Asked about what a Labor government would do to halt the rising debt, Albanese said: “Labor will be fiscally responsible.” He was obviously channelling former Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, who made a similar vow to the money markets during the 2007 election campaign.

To maintain his “better future” imagery, Albanese avoided any mention of war plans in his speech. But the previous day he reinforced Labor’s positioning as the most fervent party of the US military alliance. He accused Morrison of breaking “trust

with our most important ally” by not briefing Labor on the AUKUS treaty, a military pact with the US and UK against China, until the day before it was announced last September.

Nine Media newspapers had reported that the Biden administration asked the Coalition government to ensure bipartisan support for AUKUS, which includes the supply of long-range nuclear-powered submarines and hypersonic missiles to Australia. Morrison proceeded anyway, confident of Labor’s support, which Albanese pledged as soon as the war pact was unveiled.

Behind all the claims of a bright future, and “change” for the better, Sunday’s party events underlined the bipartisan line-up behind the real agenda of austerity, pandemic and war that will be unleashed after the election, triggering convulsive working-class struggles.

The only genuine alternative is offered by the Socialist Equality Party. We are standing candidates to advance a socialist program of action for the working class, as outlined in our election statement. We urge our readers to not just vote 1 SEP, but join the fight to build a new revolutionary socialist leadership throughout the working class in Australia and internationally.

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