

Australia's Labor government joins with Coalition to pass anti-working class bills

Mike Head
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The rightward, anti-working-class shift of the federal Labor government in response to a deepening political crisis was on display in parliament this week.

To satisfy the demands of the ruling class, and overcome what the corporate media has described as a disturbing legislative “logjam” of stalled bills, Labor teamed up with the right-wing Liberal-National Coalition to push through key anti-working class legislation.

While Labor holds a slender majority in the lower house, neither party has a majority in the upper house or Senate.

After backroom negotiations, the government struck a deal with the Coalition to effectively impose state control, via a government-appointed “administrator,” over the Construction Forestry Manufacturing and Energy Union (CFMEU) for up to five years.

Under the false banner of fighting corruption in the building industry, this legislation follows an orchestrated witch hunt by the media, corporate and political establishment, essentially directed against the wages, conditions and basic workplace and democratic rights of construction workers and the entire working class.

A similar agreement has been reached with the Coalition to push through systemic and cruel cuts to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which are a spearhead of wider austerity measures in public health, education and housing.

Such deals with the openly right-wing Coalition underscore the government's political trajectory. They are of a piece with last week's response by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and his ministers to Coalition leader Peter Dutton's call for a complete ban on visas for Palestinian refugees trying to flee the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Labor ministers insisted that the government had already effectively achieved the same outcome—first by rejecting the majority of applications, even for 12-month

visitor visas, and then by relying on the Israeli and Egyptian regimes to shut Gaza's borders so that no refugees can escape the ongoing slaughter.

Amid signs of an economic slowdown, the Labor government's increasing recourse to agreements with the Coalition to get legislation through parliament signals a definite trend towards bipartisan partnership to prosecute the agenda of big business.

Moreover, after the next election due by May, not only will the Senate remain fragmented, but there is the distinct possibility of a fragile minority government, amid widespread opposition to both major parties of big business.

Continuing anti-war demonstrations against the Israeli genocide in Gaza are just one indication of a political radicalization among workers and youth and opposition to Labor's program of war and austerity. Like the Coalition, the Labor government has backed the Israeli onslaught, along with the US-NATO war against Russia and escalating the commitment to US-led preparations for war against China. At the same time, it has imposed the burden of the economic and cost-of-living crisis on working-class households.

Media polls continue to show a resulting implosion in electoral support for Labor, below the near-record low of 32.5 percent it obtained at the May 2022 election. Labor only scraped into office on voting preferences because of the disintegration of voting support for the widely-detested Coalition after nine years in office.

Yesterday's latest *Australian Financial Review*/Freshwater Strategy poll showed the Coalition leading Labor by 51 percent to 49 percent on a nominal two-party-preferred basis for the second successive month. If repeated at the next election, the newspaper concluded, the likely result would be a minority Labor government, dependent on the Greens and independents for survival.

This would mean a highly unstable minority government, facing even greater difficulty in suppressing working-class unrest and opposition, with the help of the trade union apparatuses, to the drive to war and massive military spending, accompanied by ongoing cuts to real wages and essential public programs, including health, education and disability services.

The Coalition is in no better position than Labor, and both are wracked by factional infighting. The poll results provide a limited picture of the hostility to both the major parties of capitalist rule. The widely-reviled Coalition leader Peter Dutton's net approval rating was minus 3. That of Prime Minister Albanese was even worse—minus 10.

There is deep concern in the ruling class that the Labor government, and the parliamentary order itself, is becoming paralysed and therefore unable to sufficiently aggressively prosecute the agenda of big business.

Before the Labor-Coalition CFMEU deal, the AFR counted at least 19 promised pieces of legislation either stuck in the parliament or not yet introduced. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation commented: "Government faces legislative logjam as election deadline crunch looms."

The various stalled bills includes ones that the financial elite regard as crucial, such as those offering faster environmental approvals for mining projects, subsidies for housing developers (Build to Rent and Help to Buy bills) and multi-billion-dollar handouts for big business through Labor's Future Made in Australia legislation.

Also on the list are bills to slash international student numbers and introduce draconian powers to forcibly deport non-citizens. The government initially tried to ram the mass deportation bill through earlier this year in less than a day, triggering deep concern and opposition in Australia's many immigrant communities.

Political calculations contribute to the parliamentary gridlock, which often involves both the Coalition and the Greens, as well as "Teal" climate members of parliament. Sniffing political blood as the election looms, all are trying to distance themselves, in one way or the other, from the beleaguered government.

The Coalition is more belligerently prosecuting the demands of big business for even sharper attacks on working-class conditions, hoping to convince the financial elite that it could be a more reliable enforcer of their interests. The Greens are generally posturing, for electoral advantage, as more progressive, while still hoping to join or support a minority Labor government after the

impending election.

But the Labor leadership has already indicated its political direction by collaborating with the Coalition and refusing to accede to Greens proposals on key issues. Finance Minister Katy Gallagher said the government favoured "working in the national interest" with the Coalition because both parties recognised the "significant budget impacts of failing to deliver reform in those areas."

In other words, whatever their tactical and electoral differences, the Labor and the Coalition are both intent on seeking to impose the dictates of the financial markets for deeper cuts to social spending.

Underlying the political quagmire is the worsening economic outlook produced by the global slump and the intensifying US economic warfare measures against China, Australia's largest export market. A halving of prices for Australian iron ore exports, due to China's economic slowdown, is impacting heavily on the Australian economy and budget revenues.

Monday's AFR editorial, a voice of the financial elite, sounded the alarm about the developing political impasse. It demanded far greater measures to "boost productivity," saying both Labor and the Coalition had failed to engage with "ambitious tax, industrial relations and regulatory reform agendas."

These are code words for the further gutting of working-class conditions and jobs, and cutting corporate and high-income tax rates, in order to boost profits and the staggering accumulation of wealth in the hands of the billionaires.

Referring to the AFR's latest poll results, the editorial concluded on an ominous note: "Today's poll sounds a warning for Australia's key economic challenge. A gridlock of minority governments would mean that Canberra's productivity policy problem, which is already partly to blame for prolonging the cost-of-living pain, will only get worse after the next election."

The comment must also be a warning to workers that next government, whether Labor or Coalition will seek to make even deeper inroads into their social conditions, while ratcheting up military spending and other preparations for war.



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