

Australian election campaigning begins with lies, banalities, suppression of issues facing working people

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In the opening weeks of the new year, the governing Labor Party and the opposition Liberal-National Coalition have begun campaigning for a federal election that must be held by May, but could be called earlier.

The election will be held under conditions of a major crisis of capitalism, globally and within Australia.

That finds an immediate expression in the dire situation of both Labor and the Coalition, the traditional parties of the ruling elite. Polling has consistently placed Labor's primary vote beneath the 32.5 percent it received at the last election in 2022, which was the party's worst result since the 1930s.

Labor was only able to form government, because an even greater implosion took place in support for the Liberal Party, which lost a series of seats it had held for more than a half century. With neither party recovering from their 2022 debacle, there are acute fears in ruling circles that whichever prevails, this election will result in an unstable minority government dependent on the support of crossbenchers and minor parties.

The parlous position of Labor and the Coalition is a reflection of seething popular anger over the cost-of-living and social crisis, growing inequality, the Australian state's complicity in the Gaza genocide and a broader eruption of imperialist militarism.

The opening weeks of unofficial campaigning have shown that neither Labor nor the Coalition has any policies to address this social anger. Instead, their campaigning has been characterised by the vaguest of references to improving the cost of living and the state of the economy, without any concrete measures elaborated, and banal slogans.

The reality is that whatever their tactical differences, Labor and the Coalition agree on the fundamental questions of ruling-class policy. Both are proponents of the vast diversion of resources to the military in preparation for war, especially against China. Both are committed to sweeping austerity measures, to force the working class to pay for at least a decade of projected budget deficits. And both are attacking democratic rights, particularly with nationalist attacks on immigrants and refugees.

This real agenda, that will be implemented by whichever

party takes office, will largely be hidden from the population by the official parties and a compliant corporate press.

So too will the global context, of instability and upheaval, which will have a vast impact on Australia as every other country. That finds its sharpest expression in the looming inauguration of Donald Trump as US president. His will be a fascistic administration, which is pledged to naked and unbridled imperialist militarism, global trade war policies and attempts to establish dictatorial forms of rule.

This program is not unique to Trump in the US, but is mirrored globally, including with the ruling-class promotion of far-right and fascistic forces throughout Europe and internationally.

While covering these realities up in their campaign activities Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Coalition leader Peter Dutton are also engaged in a shadow campaign, with both pitching themselves to the ruling elite as the most viable instrument to carry out war and austerity.

In the pages of the Murdoch-owned *Australian*, Albanese last week declared that he would be best placed to collaborate with Trump. That was because of his success in developing "regional relationships," Albanese claimed. By that, he meant Australia's ever greater integration into a web of offensive military alliances directed against China, under conditions where Trump has signalled that confrontation with China will be at the centre of his foreign policy.

Dutton hit back, declaring that he was a better ally for Trump, given that both were "strong" figures. Dutton lambasted Labor figures for having previously made tepid comments, pointing to Trump's authoritarian character, which they have since walked back.

The Coalition leader has also denounced Labor as insufficiently supportive of Israel. Like local Zionist lobbyists, he has pointed to various occasions on which Labor has voted for non-binding and token ceasefire motions in the United Nations, and vaguely lamented the mass civilian death in Gaza.

Labor has responded, by dispatching its Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus to Israel this week. Dreyfus said that "In my meetings with Israeli officials I will convey Australia's support

for Israel's security and its right to defend itself in the face of terrorism.” That is a declaration of complete solidarity with a regime committing genocide, whose leaders are evading arrest warrants from the International Criminal Court for their crimes against humanity.

In their campaigning directed to the public, Albanese has led with the slogans of “building Australia’s future,” while Dutton has pledged to “get the country back on track.” Both slogans are largely devoid of content.

Albanese began his campaign with a tour of regional areas of Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia (WA) in the first week of the year. While some of the seats he visited are marginal, the central import of the trip was summed up by media references to it as a “mining tour.”

Albanese was essentially pitching himself to the mining magnates, touting his government’s commitment to expand extraction, including of critical minerals, which has been a central focus of US and Chinese competition. Labor finished the year by approving the expansion of four coal mines, having increased emissions across its term and in practice dispensed with even its own inadequate reductions targets.

Albanese made several announcements, including for \$200 million funding to build housing in remote WA, which advocates in the sector immediately noted was inadequate. While attacking the Coalition for not having any plan to address the housing crisis, Albanese’s key measures in Labor’s first term provided a boondoggle to the property developers, helping to ensure record rates of mortgage and rental stress.

Labor’s national program of seeking to build “up to” 30,000 social and affordable homes is derisory, under conditions where the shortfall in social housing is estimated in the hundreds of thousands and state Labor administrations are destroying what little remains of public housing stock.

Similarly, Albanese’s claims that wages are improving under Labor based on a slight reduction in the headline inflation rate is a fraud. Real purchasing power has declined by nine percent since 2019, the largest reversal of an OECD country, and Labor has rejected any substantive cost-of-living relief.

The threadbare character of Labor’s pledges to “build Australia’s future” were underscored by Albanese’s two main pledges on that front. His government would upgrade the Bruce Highway in Queensland, and would spend \$3 billion to complete the National Broadband Network rollout, a program that began in 2009. Some experts have noted that with technological developments, major investments in satellites would be more appropriate.

Dutton held a de facto campaign launch on Sunday in Victoria, the state where the collapse in the Liberal Party vote was sharpest in 2022. The Liberals, he declared, would end “wasteful” government spending, a pledge of even deeper austerity, while ramping up gas production and carrying out a crackdown aimed at ensuring “community safety.” Dutton explicitly linked this to bogus claims that mass opposition to

the Israeli genocide is antisemitic and impermissible.

Albanese has stated that Dutton represents a “cold-hearted, mean-spirited” politics, and has noted that under his leadership, the Coalition is “more conservative than ever.” The ascent of Dutton, a far-right figure, undoubtedly represents a further shift to the right of the Liberal-Nationals.

However, under Albanese, Labor has been in a contest with the Coalition in committing to policies similar to those of the far-right internationally. That included the bipartisan passage last December of mass deportation legislation, which could see more than 80,000 immigrants expelled from the country, caps on overseas migration and the demonisation of refugees. Labor has led the charge against pro-Palestinian protests, slandering them, overseeing aggressive police operations and threatening to ban them outright.

As reactionary as this program has been, more is being demanded. An extraordinary article by Greg Sheridan, the *Australian’s* foreign policy editor acknowledged “two foreign policy successes” of the Albanese government in its first term. Labor has “been energetic in countering Chinese influence in the South Pacific. And it has welcomed the US military into the Australian north...”

That was a reference to the fact that Labor has continuously campaigned to bully and pressure oppressed Pacific states to line up behind the US confrontation with China. And it has transformed the north of the continent into a vast base for offensive US military assets, including B-52 bombers that can carry nuclear weapons and other strike capabilities.

But, under conditions where Labor has outlined the largest increase to the military since World War II, and increased annual defence spending to a record of more than \$50 billion this financial year, Sheridan was scathing. The government was the worst on foreign policy since the 1970s because “resources never match objectives, execution never matches policy, and Australian defence spending is so notoriously inefficient.”

Speaking for the national-security establishment in Australia as well as the US, Sheridan was making plain that the next government will be tasked with a far-larger military build-up, to be implemented as rapidly as possible. And with deficits predicted for years to come, that means sweeping attacks on public hospitals and schools, already in a massive crisis, and every area of social spending.



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