

# Federal election (Australia): Good riddance to Morrison, time to fight Labor

Wednesday 25 May 2022, by [BRAMBLE Tom](#) (Date first published: 22 May 2022).

**After nine years of ruling for the rich, the Coalition government's primary vote dropped by more than 6 percent and it lost a slew of seats—and government—in yesterday's federal election. This was a public judgement of its agenda of tax cuts for the well-off, wage cuts for workers, inaction on housing, cold-hearted neglect of the elderly, and indifference to climate change.**

The defeat was also a judgement of Scott Morrison, the prime minister who buggered off to Hawaii as bushfires destroyed thousands of homes, who failed to order enough vaccines and rapid antigen tests to deal with the pandemic, who attempted to sabotage the highly popular Western Australian border closure as COVID-19 raged in the eastern states, who did nothing to counter the culture of sexual abuse in parliament and whose idea of governing amounted to little more than posing for photos.

The billionaires never had it so good as under the Coalition. Their fortunes rose to stratospheric heights. The Coalition showered money on private schools. After promising to follow the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry, Morrison quietly shelved virtually all of them, protecting the Liberal Party's rich mates. It was the same with the Royal Commission into aged care, which lifted the lid on the appalling situation in privately run facilities. Virtually nothing has changed since the Commission handed down its report.

The Morrison government threw tens of billions of dollars in subsidies to business during the pandemic, even when these businesses in many cases were continuing to make substantial profits.

The poor got shafted under successive Liberal prime ministers. JobSeeker payments are at scandalously low levels. Social security recipients were persecuted under the robodebt program, which generated fake debts and drove tens of thousands to stress and some to suicide. And as inflation began to run hot, the government could only offer a future of endless wage cuts. Ministers told workers looking for wage relief that they should just get a better paid job, those suffering rental stress that they should just buy a house. And students were slugged with big increases in university fees.

Through it all, the military was expanded, and the Morrison government began to ramp up threats of war against China. Hundreds of billions that should go to welfare, health and education are instead going to building up the means of mass destruction.

So good riddance to the Morrison government.

Labor has won office, but hardly received a ringing endorsement. Its primary vote has sunk to an historic low. It won at least seven seats but in large part only because of Greens preferences. Only a strong performance in Western Australia put it in a position to potentially form a majority

government. In several outer suburban seats in Melbourne, Labor's primary vote fell by double digits.

That Labor's primary vote is even lower than in 2019, the previous long-term low, is an indictment on the ALP's rightward shift since losing that election. The conclusion the party leaders took from that loss was that they had to retreat from offering even the mildest program of redistribution to the working class. Out the window went the policies tackling tax breaks for the middle classes and wealthy—franking credits, capital gains tax concessions, negative gearing. Out went any rhetoric about attacking the top end of town. Out went any hint that Labor might seriously deal with climate change and the fossil fuel industry.

Under Albanese and shadow Treasurer Jim Chalmers, the rhetoric was now about helping the “aspirational” voter. Soon after the 2019 election, Labor backed the Morrison government's program of tax cuts for the well-off and threw its support behind the Carmichael coal mine and the opening of the Galilee Basin in central Queensland. It was this reaction to defeat three years ago that explains why Labor had nothing to offer. As Chalmers told the Press Club just days before the election: “We want to be a pro-business, pro-employer Labor Party”.

The low combined primary vote for the two major parties indicates significant and growing dissatisfaction with the political status quo. From 1946 until the early 1990s, the two parties racked up 90 percent or more of the vote, and in the following two decades, at least 80 percent. At this election, the two parties won the support of just 68 percent of the electorate.

The beneficiaries of this shift away from the major parties vary enormously. The Greens have certainly benefited from declining loyalty to the ALP and received their highest ever primary vote results in the Senate and the House in this election, beating their previous best, which was in 2010. The party had a swing towards it in its only lower house seat of Melbourne, won two in Brisbane and is in the running to claim another. The Greens also picked up several extra Senate spots.

The party's pitch was overall to the left of Labor, with policies to tax big business and the mining industry to fund dental and mental health care in Medicare, free childcare, increased public school funding, the wiping of student debt and the construction of one million new homes, along with halting all new coal mines and gas projects. Its strong vote was one of the few things to welcome on election night—it tells us that well over a million voters are looking for a party more progressive than Labor.

In what might possibly be the most significant development in this election, the so-called teal independents destroyed much of the Liberals' parliamentary representation in wealthy areas in Sydney and Melbourne. In doing so, they exposed the deep rift in the Australian ruling class's preferred party of government. It appears that tens of thousands of relatively affluent, professional middle class voters, disproportionately women, turned on their traditional party in protest at its misogyny and refusal to seriously address climate change. It is impossible to tell how permanent this schism might be, and whether they form a stable parliamentary bloc.

The far right also picked up votes from the major parties and represent an increasing problem. One Nation stood in many more seats than in 2019 and, combined with Clive Palmer's United Australia Party (UAP), the two boosted their primary vote by 2.7 percent to 9.2 percent. Adding the Liberal Democrats and other far right micro parties takes the far-right vote to 11.7 percent, up by 5.0 percentage points since the last election. Worryingly, the far right did well not just in their regional strongholds and traditional Liberal suburbs, but also increased their vote in traditionally Labor-voting working-class outer suburbs in Sydney and Melbourne, where they picked up 15-20 percent. Unsurprisingly, the UAP lost Liberal Party recruit Craig Kelly's lower house seat, but the party might

yet claim a Senate seat in Victoria.

Finally, the Victorian Socialists (VS), which openly championed the working class against the billionaires, standing in eleven seats across the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne, put up a decent fight. Fielding 700 volunteers, VS had won more than 20,000 first preference votes when the counting of votes closed on election night, easily the largest number of votes for a socialist electoral project in many decades. In Calwell in Melbourne's northern suburbs, VS notched up just shy of 5 percent of the primary votes and in Fraser in the west, 5.4 percent. Elsewhere in the north, VS fought off stiff competition for the left vote to win 3-4 percent. In some cases, VS candidates outpolled those from the far right. In November, VS will be repeating this enormous effort in the Victorian state election.

The Albanese government will be sworn into office on Monday, but offers little to those millions who wanted the Morrison government tossed out. Even though Labor's leaders claim the party will defend workers' living standards, they refuse to push for a real increase to the minimum wage. They will do nothing to keep a lid on prices. They will do nothing to control rents or expand public housing. And they will do nothing to help workers build union power to fight for higher wages on the job.

All the pressure now is the other way. With government debt ballooning from \$273 billion in 2013 to a forecast \$1 trillion next year, and with interest rates rising, the bosses and their representatives in the financial press are demanding urgent action to cut government spending. For years, they were urging the government to do something to lift wages; now they are saying that wages must be cut to curb inflation. Expect public spending cuts from this Labor government in coming years. And don't expect the ALP to go after the rich to do their bit. Labor is committed to tax cuts in 2024 that will benefit those on incomes of more than \$200,000 to the tune of billions of dollars.

With the world economy now looking shakier than for some years, we can anticipate that a Labor government will do the bosses' bidding in enforcing sacrifices for the working class. To prove their commitment to the capitalists during the election campaign, Albanese and Chalmers pointed to the experience of previous Labor governments, in particular those of Hawke and Keating, when Labor brought the union leaders, bosses and government together to screw the working class (or, as Labor's leaders put it, to lift productivity and profits). This is just what they have in mind for us now.

Nor can we expect to see Labor take serious action to deal with climate change. Labor is committed to the fossil fuel industries and its carbon emissions targets are a joke.

While Labor offers nothing and as the economic circumstances for millions get tougher, we can expect to see growing dissatisfaction with a government that has weak foundations and that only one-third of the electorate actually voted for. The right will undoubtedly try to capitalise on this dissatisfaction. With many of the so-called Liberal moderates losing their seats, with Peter Dutton keeping his, and with the Nationals holding up their vote, the balance in the Coalition will shift to the right.

Tony Abbott's former chief of staff Peta Credlin wasted no time arguing in Murdoch's Sunday tabloids that the Liberals must move further right to reconnect to their supporters in the outer suburbs who had abandoned them for the far-right parties. The far right will be emboldened by their experience in this election and, if they can cohere their forces, may be in a position to mobilise people in protests against a federal Labor government as they did in Victoria in opposition to lockdowns and vaccine mandates late last year and earlier this year.

The threat from the right must be combatted. If the Albanese government will not lift a finger to

defend workers' living standards in the face of rising inflation, unions will have to strike. That will involve an argument in our unions both to convince fellow workers that we can organise and fight but also against our union leaders who have done their best to turn our unions into electoral machines to get the vote out for Labor. The union leaders have stood by for years while the bosses and governments have got away with whittling away jobs and workplace rights. That has to end.

To wage such a fight, we need to build a bigger socialist current in workplaces and on university campuses. The growth of the far-right vote at this election illustrates the potential for other forces to take advantage of the situation. We have to fight for the politics of solidarity and socialism against the politics of division and despair to point a way forward for workers and students everywhere.

**Tom Bramble**

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**P.S.**

- Red Flag. Sunday, 22 May 2022:

- <https://redflag.org.au/article/good-riddance-morrison-time-fight-labor>

- Tom Bramble is co-author, with Mick Armstrong, of the book 'The Fight for Workers' Power: Revolution and Counter-Revolution in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century', published by Interventions.