

The end of education and the rise of the fascist Australian Labor Party

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Dear friends,

Another day in hell. In the last fortnight we have seen: the ALP eject an elected member over their relatively limp anti-genocide stance [1], the rapid increase in cost of education visas [2], the taxation of higher degrees by research [3], and many policy and party platform transformations to reconfigure the once upon a time centrist party as the firmly right wing player.

Where does the fascism start? If we momentarily set aside the deliberately genocidal and narcissistic behaviour of the Australian Government and its ALP rulers, we have just as recently borne witness to the systematic decimation of higher education -in the long run. Education in this country is government controlled. Allegedly public schools and universities are run for the public interest. In reality this has always been the hegemony's interest. While higher education, in particular, has been seen as a relative bastion of liberal thought, over the past 30 years in Australia, there has been an acceleration towards corporatised, privatised, and conservative thought and decision making.

Importantly, the "liberal thought" of higher education in Australia has always been a centrist, socially and economically conservative, and static status quo. This enabled higher education institutions to avoid neoliberalism longer than other institutions, not because they were special, but because in this country they were already functioning under managerialist, cost-saving, and conservative models. This was brought by the ALP in decades past, unlike how neoliberalism arrived in the rest of the world [4]. The intensification of crack-downs on research funding for the arts, humanities, social sciences, and, frankly, anything the conservative Minister for Education doesn't like was a hallmark of the Liberal-National coalition. While this intervention was allegedly reversed relatively early in the ALP's most recent term in government, these two most recent developments only show a re-commitment to the rapid deskilling of the working class due to ripple affects.

As recently as last week the NTEU, the union for higher education, and CAPA, the peak body for postgraduate students, called for raising the wage of research students to the minimum wage. Currently, Australian postgraduate research students are paid approximately \$30,000 per year -tax free. This approximately \$14 per hour wage is supposed to enable transformative science, radical thought, new frontiers in social transformation, and to up-skill workers for the next generation of higher education - as well as covering the cost of living. Instead, the government has decided to tax this stipend, in addition to preventing more than 7.5 hours of work per week (or 30% of the stipend, whichever comes first).

Australian higher education has long been wholly dependent on international students to sustain itself. Importantly, while this is financially irresponsible, this is the status quo in higher education. For domestic students to be educated, the university sector requires international student enrolments, this is because of the exorbitant fees. In another regressive decision from the past week, the ALP has also announced the almost doubling of the international study visa cost. This deters international students from Australian institutions, and even those who are currently enrolled may reconsider returning for study in 2025.

Atop funding cuts, massive indexation on study debt for domestic students, previous policy which continues to influence study flows towards "professions", and other tax disincentives for institutions, donors, and so on, the financial situation of most universities is now dire. After a massive downturn during COVID-19 lockdowns, the sector has been incredibly slow

to recover. With these latest developments amounting to punching down by government on higher education and students simultaneously.

Okay -this brings us to fascism.

There has been a clear repositioning of the ALP from the so called centre-left party, connected integrally to unions, to occupying the centre-right, and now the right -and, as illustrated above, completely disconnected from the worker. We have seen the Liberal-National Coalition progress further to the extreme right, and their 'retreat' or continued loss of popularity with the majority populous. Now, drawing on their tactics, the ALP seeks to reposition itself as the party for the capitalists -millenials, boomers, never mind, this is distinctively class warfare. From a prime minister with a massive housing portfolio, who could expect pro-renter housing policy? From a foreign minister with an ongoing relationship with Israel, who could expect anti-genocidal policy? The bourgeois hegemony of the ALP now rivals the Howard era in contemptibility.

Recent propaganda from the ALP's MPs and candidates indicates copying the LNP's homework directly. Investment in churches, increased funding in private schools, reducing tax (for the 1%), individualist claims in individualist times. Inwardly, past the propaganda, is a continued and deeply economically conservative party whose financial interests lie with property developers, investors, corporate CEOs, and other plutocrats. Socially, the ALP stands on the side of genocide, so I do not believe I need to say more about their positionality.

With this divestment from even a 'liberal' centrist educational system, which I will at this juncture point out continues in its hegemonic control by the government from preschool through graduate education, we are now seeing the ALP stamp their mark as the anti-intellectual part of the country. A populist movement not seen in left-wing (populist) politics in the anglosphere. Indeed, the right gut and disfigure education the world over, and when it talks like a duck, acts like a duck, and makes regressive policy decisions like a duck, it's probably a duck -sorry, fascist. With higher education being on the chopping block it is a matter of time before the future of this country becomes increasingly narrow and devastatingly less class-conscious. The latter was already fading away beyond belief, particularly given the dire state of a corrupt, narcissistic, profiteering, yet underfunded and radically unequal, higher education system. The future does not look bright.

We need an education system that fosters class consciousness. We need a curriculum, from preschool to higher education, that enables positive social transformation. We need more equality, acceptance, and communal spirit to push back the ravages of unchecked neoliberal capitalism. Instead, we are seeing an increasingly desperate focus by governments and political figures on the de-skilling and anti-intellectualising of the populous and constant undermining of those in vague positions to be able to create a better future together. Such is the rise of global fascism.

We can but hope for a French-style left-jerk in the next election, but the Murdoch press are so hellbent on authoritarianism that they still back the LNP in the face of a "nuclear overlord". The Greens as the last remaining centre-left party in Australia are in dire straits. The rhetoric that the Greens are the 'radical left' is so ingrained in the populous by the ALP, LNP, and Murdoch monopoly, that the average citizen still thinks the ALP represents a centrist position. This is patently untrue -fascism is here, and it wears red (again).

In solidarity,

Aidan

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1. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/article/2024/jul/06/fatima-payman-quits-labor-party-palestine-voters-base>

2. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/article/2024/jul/07/international-student-cap-visa-fees-increase-albanese-government>
3. <https://www.campusreview.com.au/2024/07/taxing-part-time-postgrad-study-strange-punitive-measure/>
4. Humphrys, E. (2019). How Labour built neoliberalism: Australia's accord, the labour movement and the neoliberal project. Brill.