

Trump's rise causes disquiet in Australian ruling circles

By Mike Head
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Donald Trump's emergence as the presumptive US Republican presidential candidate has been met with a mixture of consternation and nervousness in Australia's media and political establishment, both for foreign and domestic policy reasons. Alarm over the implications of a Trump presidency for the Australian ruling elite's long reliance on the US military alliance has been accompanied by anxiety over the popular discontent that Trump has exploited.

In his comments on foreign policy, Trump has combined "America First" isolationism, demanding that US allies ramp up their own military spending, with provocative denunciations of China and aggressive assertions of American might. Trump has declared he will stop China "raping" America, back the use of torture by US forces and encourage Japan and South Korea to acquire nuclear weapons.

Domestically, he has employed fascistic demagoguery, seeking to divert the seething social discontent among working people by scapegoating immigrants and other minorities, and promoting extreme nationalism in economic and foreign policy. His rise marks the advanced decomposition of American democracy. As the WSWWS has warned:

The impending nomination of Trump means that a substantial section of the American ruling class has concluded that the defense of its interests requires massive political repression within the United States and war against competitors and enemies beyond its borders.

During a radio interview last week, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull sought to downplay the potential fallout. He insisted that he had "absolutely no doubt"

Australia would "always have a very, very strong friend and ally in Washington," regardless of who was elected president. "Our relationship with the United States is so deep—it's based on thousands if not millions of individual relationships, it's been built up over generations," he said.

Turnbull's remarks underscore the integration of Australia's political, military and security elite into that of Washington since World War II, in order to secure the predatory interests of Australian imperialism in the Asia-Pacific region. Since taking office last September, Turnbull has been at pains to publicly maintain the commitment made by the previous Labor government to the Obama administration's "pivot" or "rebalance" to Asia to counter the rise of China and prepare for war against Beijing if necessary, despite China becoming Australian capitalism's largest export market over the past decade.

At the same time, Turnbull voiced concern about Trump's capacity to tap into the social "tension" produced by mounting inequality in the US, while trying to deny any such disaffection in Australia. "Income inequality is a big issue in the United States," Turnbull said. "We have much more equality in incomes in Australia because we have a much better targeted social welfare system. But there are a lot of tensions there and I think support for Trump is clearly evidence of that."

In reality, widening inequality—a global phenomenon—is also producing growing political unrest and volatility in Australia, as demonstrated by the inability of any prime minister to survive a full parliamentary term since 2007. Turnbull's recourse to an unpredictable "double dissolution" election of all members of both houses of parliament on July 2, in an attempt to break through a Senate blockage of deeply unpopular key austerity measures, is further evidence of a similar underlying political crisis to that convulsing America.

Figures within the Australian security establishment, where there are close ties to Washington, have expressed alarm that a Trump presidency might signal a waning US commitment to Australia's interests. Former Australian Security Intelligence Organisation director-general David Irvine told an Australian Strategic Policy Institute conference in Canberra last month that a Trump victory would "totally overturn the Asia-Pacific appletart, with a nuclear Japan or a nuclear South Korea." The foundation of Asia-Pacific security would be "turned on its head" and Australia would have to significantly increase its own military capability.

Reflecting these concerns, former Labor Party leader Kim Beazley, who recently completed a six-year appointment as Australia's ambassador to Washington, has warned that a Trump White House would have "devastating" consequences for relations with China and for US trade commitments, notably the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the proposed US-led economic bloc across the region.

"Were Trump to be elected, the impact on American positioning on global trade would be disastrous," Beazley told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on May 5. "Visceral hostility to the American free trade position—that has been a lifetime Trump commitment." In a lecture last month, Beazley declared that Trump had "no regard for alliances at all." If Trump won the presidency, "it is certain the TPP would not go through" and "the effect would be potentially quite devastating."

Beazley also represents the pro-Washington leadership that has long been entrenched inside the Labor Party. He strongly backed Hillary Clinton, a proven ruthless prosecutor of the military and economic interests of the US and its allies. Her victory would be "reassuring" because "she would be most likely to replicate in minds of friends and opponents of America what it has stood for traditionally," including the "rebalance" toward Asia.

Similar anxieties have been voiced by another figure with close connections in Washington, the *Australian's* foreign editor Greg Sheridan. "On the basis of declared policy, Clinton would be an infinitely better president for Australia than Trump," he wrote on May 5. "Clinton values alliances, is widely experienced and works for stability." But Sheridan noted that she was "by no means inspiring, to anybody," giving Trump "burgeoning electoral plausibility."

This posed an acute dilemma. "All my national security Republican friends in Washington detest Trump and many plan to vote for Clinton or not vote at all." Perhaps,

Sheridan suggested, they should "get close to his campaign to try to draw it into strategic reality and responsibility." Sheridan gave voice to the perplexity in ruling circles. "Anything at all is possible now," he concluded.

Mark Latham, another former Labor Party leader, has welcomed the Trump ascendancy, openly extolling his fascistic demagoguery as a means of channeling social unrest, while promoting the illusion that Trump would be less of a "dangerous warmonger" than George Bush, Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton. In a March 29 column in Murdoch's Sydney *Daily Telegraph* tabloid, Latham hailed Trump for advocating "bold solutions to longstanding problems, such as illegal immigration and deficit budgeting, backed by his personal story in building a lucrative business career."

Clearly, Latham, who led Labor from 2003 to 2005, would relish playing a similar role to Trump. Revealing an abiding contempt for the working class, he declared that Trump appealed to voters not only because the billionaire was ostensibly anti-establishment, but shared their views. "Why shouldn't they support a successful, down-to-earth candidate who talks their language and shares their values?"

Furthermore, Latham argued, Trump's "foreign policy is in our national interest." Trump, Latham claimed, "has been highly critical of Bush and the neo-con invasion of Iraq, which resulted in the death of 4,500 American servicemen and the rise of Islamic State—a truly vulgar outcome." A Trump presidency "would mean no more fiascos like Vietnam and Iraq, sparing young Australian lives from the futile killing fields of US-led invasions."

Far from opposing imperialist war, this view reflects essentially tactical divisions within both the American and Australian ruling classes provoked by the catastrophic outcomes of the interventions in Vietnam and the Middle East. Above all, Latham, like Trump, is looking to whip up nationalism as means of diverting the rising social discontent in a reactionary and violent direction that would inevitably entail war against foreign rivals as well as domestic repression.

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