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OPINION 13

James Morrow



Coal is the only thing saving Labor from energy chaos

Ted O'Brien



“I am indeed a handsome boy” Anthony Albanese whispers to himself as he sets off from Kirribilli House admiring his own magnificence, adorning a spectacular climate change cloak woven by the prophet Chris Bowen.

“But the emperor hasn’t got anything on,” exclaim local residents.

“Shh, just be quiet and applaud,” counsel greenies, dressed in teal.

Labor’s promise to accelerate Australia’s action on climate change deserves ridicule.

After spending the best part of a decade beating up the Coalition, Labor came to office only to reverse the downward trajectory of Australia’s emissions.

Upon winning government, Albanese and his ministers strutted the world stage spruiking their climate change plans, exclaiming “Australia is back”.

But recent figures show emissions are down 28.2 per cent on 2005 levels, marking an increase from the Coalition’s success in reducing emissions from 8.6 to 29.0 per cent between 2013 to 2022.

Despite promising a \$275 reduction in household power bills at the last election, families are paying up to \$1000 more than what Labor had promised. Australia now has among the highest electricity prices in the world.

This explains why manufacturing insolvencies have tripled, and over

600 families have gone on energy hardship arrangements every single week, since Labor came to office.

Soaring prices aren’t the only problem. The market operator recently warned of diminishing energy supplies and that the lights would only stay on if all of Labor’s plans were delivered on time and in full.

That’s a big ‘if’. I can’t find an energy

analyst in the country who believes Labor’s target of 82 per cent renewables by 2030 will be achieved.

The Clean Energy Council has reported deal closures for new renewable generation in the first half of 2024 of 1.6 GW, nowhere near the 6 to 7 GW required annually to reach Labor’s 2030 target.

This exposes Labor’s dirty little secret – its ‘extend and pretend’ strategy for coal. In the second quarter of 2024, coal contributed 60.8 per cent in the National Electricity Market, up from 58.2 per cent last year. Amidst a wind drought and gas shortages this winter, coal bridged the gap.

I hold no personal affection for coal, but believe we need clear eyed

pragmatism, coupled with a proper plan – not a fantasy – to shift away from the fuel. As Labor’s renewables rollout stalls, it kills off gas and refuses to consider zero-emissions nuclear energy, it will have no choice but to double down on coal.

Anthony Albanese’s reluctance to confront this reality is not just cowardice; it creates an unwieldy system that drives up prices and puts

reliability at risk.

If Labor stopped fawning over the emperor’s clothes, and started planning instead of pretending, an orderly energy transformation may prevail.

Ted O’Brien is shadow energy minister