

## A Reminder that Australia Is a Plutocracy

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*With a federal election just around the corner, the Australian Electoral Commission’s annual report on donations to political parties on February 1 was a sober reminder that Australia is still a plutocracy — a country ruled by the rich — and that we are about to have another deeply corrupted exercise on “democracy”.*

As the chair of the Centre for Public Integrity, **Anthony Whealy QC**, told [ABC News](#):

“What we can see is that a handful of donors dominate the funding of political parties. Big money has big impact, with the top 10 donors funding almost a quarter of all donations.”

One of Australia’s richest people, billionaire **Anthony Pratt**, was the biggest declared political donor, giving some \$1.3 million to the Liberals. The other usual suspects, including the big mining companies, fossil fuel companies, corporate media companies, developers and gambling and alcohol companies, were all in there, giving nearly all their donations to the traditional parties of government: the Liberals, the Nationals and Labor.

Since the information in this report is from a year or so ago, the traditional jump in political donations ahead of the next federal election is not included.

Further, [more than a third](#) of political donations are anonymous because of longstanding loopholes in the disclosure rules.

While the report revealed that the big end of town is clearly giving more money to the Coalition parties ([\\$84 million](#)) than Labor ([\\$67 million](#)), the second- and third-biggest donations (after Pratt’s biggest donation to the Liberals) went to a right-wing organisation associated with the “Freedom” protests around the country, according to [Crikey.com](#).

“Following Pratt on the list are two political donations worth \$1 million to conservative activist group Advance Australia — one from Silver River Investment Holdings

(\$650,000) and Cartwright Investment Corp Ltd (\$350,000).

“Silver River Investments’ directors are Simon and Elizabeth Fenwick of Mosman in Sydney. Elizabeth is also listed as the sole director of Cartwright Investment Corp. Simon, a former fund manager, announced his intention to start bankrolling Advance Australia in 2020, citing concerns about ‘left-wing agendas’ and ‘dictatorial’ politicians like Dan Andrews.

“Created ahead of the 2019 election as a right-wing GetUp, Advance Australia has recently focused its energy on attacking COVID restrictions and vaccine mandates. Recent Facebook ads claiming Australians were being forced to get vaccinated were removed from the platform ...

“The largest individual donor was William Nitschke, who made four donations worth \$300,000 to Rod Culleton’s Great Australian Party, which is running conspiracy theorist Pete Evans as a Senate candidate at the election. It’s the second year running in which Nitschke has been the largest individual donor.”

There were no political donations reported from the other billionaire funder of the far right, Clive Palmer. But he may have thrown in his money after July 1, 2021, the end of the reporting period.

We should remember that these millions of dollars in political donations are totally dwarfed by the money the corporate rich get back in the forms of subsidies, tax concessions and tax cuts.

Billionaire Pratt, for instance, donated \$1.3 million but received a \$10 million grant from the federal government’s bushfire recovery fund in the same reporting period. On top of that, [Pratt claimed billions](#) in an accelerated depreciation scheme, one of the federal government’s corporate pandemic welfare measures that was introduced just as income protection measures for the unemployed were removed.

The [Sydney Morning Herald](#) reported that “resources companies were the highest spending sector, giving almost \$2 million, more than half of which went to the Coalition”. It said oil and gas giant Woodside donated \$232,350 and that Chevron and Santos “were smaller spenders”, giving less than \$75,000 each.

Energy baron Trevor St Baker’s family trust donated almost \$113,000 to the Coalition and \$54,500 to Labor, the *SMH* said. “Lobby groups the Minerals Council of Australia and Low Emissions Technology Australia (previously called Coal21) gave the parties more than \$300,000 combined.”

In the same period, the Australia Institute reported that the mineral and energy sector benefited from a record [\\$10.3 billion in fossil fuel subsidies](#) and a third of mining companies [paid no tax](#).

These numbers reveal we live in a plutocracy. If you agree with *Green Left* that this is not only unjust but unsustainable you should join us in building the people power needed to expose and fight the plutocrats. Become a [supporter](#) today and make a [donation](#) to our Fighting Fund.

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*Featured image: Billionaire Anthony Pratt has been revealed as the biggest donor to the major parties.  
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