

MUTINY!

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THE ANARCHIST'S ELECTORAL TASK

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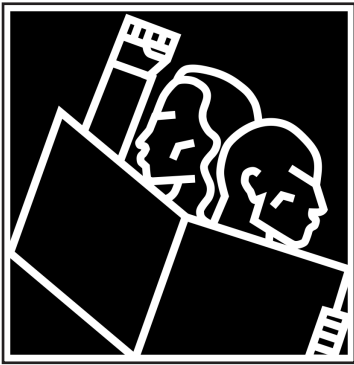
Why Independents are Liberals in disguise

Editorial

We would like to acknowledge that the land on which we live, work, and organise is unceded Aboriginal land.

We pay our respects to the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, on whose lands Black Flag Sydney is based. We offer our absolute and unequivocal solidarity to all First Nations peoples fighting for liberation, here and overseas.

We stand together now and always.



Welcome to the latest ‘most important election ever’. Once again, our options range from bad to worse, with the possible exception of candidates who might simply be deemed inadequate. With voting helpfully compulsory in Australia, our triennial electoral ritual is the only moment sure to bring almost everyone in the country into contact with the hopeless intransigence of the state and the incompetence of its deputies.

Rather than provide a handy How To Vote for our readers, we hope this edition will serve as a guide to the absolute state of affairs that is AusPol in election season. We call for direct action and mass movement building, now as always, to offer some hope to those that (rightfully) see despair at both ends of the ballot paper and seek an alternative to piecemeal parliamentary reformism.

With reports on the previous election and the current wave of far-right mobilisations, and the impact these might have on the 2022 election, we provide some context to the position of the major parties. With in-depth analyses on each of these parties and their Independent™ challengers, we provide our view on the particular failures, gaps, disappointments, and false promises offered up by the politicians vying for your vote. And in full-colour, we offer our brief take on the nature of democracy in 2022 – a term anarchists would do well to reclaim from the farcical bourgeois electoralist associations with which it has long been tarnished.

With each edition, the social revolution draws nearer! We hope you enjoy this one, and we’ll see you on the streets soon.

REPORT

The 2019 Election

The instability of the Federal Liberal Party was made clear even before the last election, when the leadership spill against then Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull brought Scott Morrison to power in late 2018. Members began to distance themselves from the party and either resigned, or became or supported Independents (a rising trend among liberals and capitalists as a means of self-preservation in mainstream politics). People with no love for the Coalition’s politics felt a glimmer of hope as the government polled terribly (losing about 53 2-party-preferred polls to Labor in a row).

Once Scott Morrison called the election, the Liberal Party campaign’s key messaging was that Bill Shorten is “the Bill Australia can’t afford” - its claim that Labor was going to wreck the economy. However, its own policies continued to support the petite bourgeoisie, bosses, and - worst of all - the fossil fuel industry. They promised no changes to negative gearing or capital gains tax and

the continuation of cash payments to self-funded retirees as a rebate for franking credits, despite them paying no tax in that year. This policy was a direct response to Labor’s proposal to end franking credits for self-funded retirees, which became one of the most contentious policies of the election.

While the Liberal Party’s policies were lukewarm, Labor’s policies were even more uninspiring. Indeed, despite this supposedly being “the Climate Election,” Labor’s climate policy differed little from the LNP’s, committing to the same ineffective policy of carbon offsets and credits if they were elected. The Greens were the only party with a comprehensive climate platform of 100% renewables and public ownership of electricity, and their vote increased accordingly.

The independent Zali Steggall also rode the climate wave to victory over Tony Abbott, but her time in parliament (predictably for the moderate liberalism she represents) has been ineffectual.

REPORT

The Far-Right

In 2022, the far-right is in some sense more divided than ever.

Though the anti-vaxx movement seemed to provide it with a fertile field for recruitment, its ability to draw these disparate conspiracy theorists and crackpots into a cohesive political formation has been questionable. Only a few years ago, it seemed like the far-right was on the up and up, but now they are quite clearly on the back foot: the backlash in the wake of the Christchurch massacre has been immense, and in addition to the regular attention from anti-fascists, they now find themselves under significant pressure from both the Australian government and the mainstream media.

The far-right in Australia has always included activists who prioritise electoral politics, and activists who focus more on “street” politics. They occasionally have a symbiotic relationship: the street activists relish the opportunity to influence the political process and enjoy the attention politicians can

bring to their causes. Similarly, the politicians enjoy what the street activists can offer as political organisers, staffers, and volunteers. This election is a significant test for the anti-vaxx “freedom” movement, which has lost substantial steam compared to its peaks at the end of last year. The electoral returns will show exactly how many citizens prioritise “freedom” over all other political concerns. The return of Clive Palmer will be pivotal. Compared to his run in 2013, this time he has linked himself far more with the right-wing, positioning his United Australia party as the premiere electoral expression of the anti-vaxx, anti-lockdown freedom movement.

His candidates are a tangled array of anti-vaxxers, self-promoters and simple wingnuts, with the only significant figure being the ex-Liberal MP Craig Kelly. His decision to recruit Kelly as the federal leader was calculated on both sides; Palmer can use Kelly’s notoriety and Kelly can use the massive cash injections he needs

The two party preferred results were marginal and the coalition retained government - 50.7% v.s. 49.3%. The election was largely decided by Preference votes (almost 70%). This showed voters were moving away from the 2-party preferred system and preferences for 3rd parties and independent candidates were increasing. It is clear that people do not find either major parties worthy of their first preference.

Since the 2019 election, Australia has seen continued inaction on climate, lack of investment in necessary public services such as healthcare and transportation, and no serious raise of the rate for unemployed workers. All of these sectors were in dire need before the fires, floods, and plague of the last few years worsened the plight of the working class. It is in this state that we now approach another election, this time with a more reactionary opposition than before.

to run his political campaigns. Palmer’s most realistic aim is to get a few of his candidates elected in the midst of a hung parliament and squeeze the major parties through negotiations. However, this goal will most realistically be undercut by Palmer himself, who is terrible at holding together a political coalition. While we won’t know exactly what the election will mean for the far-right until the dust settles, we will need to watch out for ways the political process throws up new ways for us to fight back. While we’d love a resounding electoral loss for the far-right, we know that even that wouldn’t be a long term victory. There’ll still be the Nazis on the street and the racist populists that will try and mobilise to attack our side of the fence; there’ll still be the integration of far-right ideas into the political mainstream.

Our aim is not simply to ensure that the far-right is beaten at the ballot box, but to ensure they are beaten everywhere.

ANALYSIS

The Liberal Party Champion of the bourgeoisie

FOR NEARLY TEN YEARS, Australian leftists have been chanting, “One, two, three, four, kick the Liberals out the door!” The Liberals and Nationals are the capitalist classes’ foremost advocates in Parliament. Whether doubling Arts students’ university fees, attacking unions, or reintroducing the inhumane temporary protection visa scheme, the Coalition is an enemy of the working class everywhere and must be opposed. This article focuses briefly on four issues, including those which Black Flag have been most actively organizing in.

Climate Change

Scott Morrison’s brandishing of a lump of coal in Parliament and his Hawaii holiday during the 2020-21 bushfires have been criticized and mocked endlessly. But the Coalition’s climate policy is no laughing matter; since being forced to pivot from the Howard Government’s policy of climate denial, successive Coalition governments instead pursued climate inaction, lobbying against a UNESCO recommendation to put the Great Barrier Reef on the ‘danger’ list, putting taxpayer money towards a ‘gas-led recovery’ to supposedly get us out of the COVID-19 pandemic’s economic woes, and planning to cut climate change programs in the 2022-3 budget.

What are the Coalition’s responses to criticisms on their climate policy? The Coalition has committed to a net zero emissions target before 2050. This target not only falls short of the emissions targets scientists agree that we need in order to limit warming to 1.5° or even 2.0°, but heavily relies on unspecified ‘technology breakthroughs’ and carbon offsets, the latter of which has been shown to be a taxpayer-funded rort for corporations.

In the 2022-3 budget, the government has advertised funding for the Great Barrier Reef, Antarctic research, Indigenous rangers, and plastic recycling, all while committing to opening new fossil fuel projects.

More ‘moderate’ Liberals, such as Dave Sharma – who has tried to establish his climate credentials since facing opposition from ‘climate independent’ Allegra Spender – have failed to achieve meaningful climate policy, relying on benchmarks like the Paris Agreement, which scientists agree is insufficient to prevent the global temperature rising by 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Queer Discrimination

The Liberal Party has never been a friend to the queer community, no matter how many Mardi Gras floats it has. In 2017, same-sex marriage passed in spite of multiple Liberals voting against or abstaining from the final conscience vote. Appallingly, 2021 has seen the Coalition introduce two high profile homophobic and transphobic laws. In February, the Coalition tried to pass through the Religious Discrimination Bill, which is now indefinitely shelved. It sought to protect discriminatory ‘statements of belief’ from existing state-based discrimination laws, provided that they are based on genuinely held religious beliefs and permitted schools to discriminate against LGBTBI+ teachers. Before its amendment, it would have also permitted schools to expel LGBTBI+ students.

Most recently, Claire Chandler, a senator in the National Right faction of the Liberal Party, has introduced the Sex Discrimination and Other Legislation Amendment (Save Women’s Sport) Bill 2022, which moves to ban transgender women from female sports. It has nothing to do with ensuring ‘equality’ in sport – since it seems unique physical traits are celebrated in athletes only if the athlete is not transgender – and everything to do with dehumanizing transgender women and stoking the flames of the culture war, in order to distract from the class war. Morrison initially supported the Bill before public backlash and endorsed transphobic Katherine Deves as candidate for the seat of Warringah.

Cost of Living

The Liberals have also overseen nearly a decade of significant increases in the cost of living, as well as stagnating wages. The cost of living crisis is not something that suddenly emerged during the pandemic or Russo-Ukrainian war. Rather, the crisis has slowly emerged thanks to the Liberals’ inability to meaningfully address inflation and wage stagnation, and has been exacerbated by their ongoing attacks on the union movement, the crippling of penalty rates, and the public sector wage freeze at the state level.

With inflation continuing to rise, and wages lagging behind, we can’t expect this issue to simply ‘go away’ with the band-aid solutions the Liberals have promised in their latest budget. Rather than seeking to genuinely address this ongoing crisis, the Morrison government’s federal budget is nothing more than a series of attempts to bribe us into

supporting them at the next election. One of the centerpieces of the budget, a series of one-off payments in the form of tax breaks, conveniently comes into effect in the 6 weeks between now and the election. The policy is a short-term fix to an issue that has been years in the making, as wages stagnated and the Liberals struggled to handle rising inflation, and just one policy of many that shows just how unfriendly the Liberals are to the working class. Instead of committing to increasing welfare rates, support for student workers, reinstating penalty rates and ending the public sector wage freeze, the party has chosen their own electoral success over the livelihoods of workers, proving that they are indeed an enemy of the working class – if this wasn’t already clear from their lifelong opposition to the union movement, through which workers win better wages and conditions.

Militarism

The Budget also promised a record amount of money to military spending, as the Liberals continue their warmongering agenda. The financial commitment was foreshadowed over the last six months as the government committed to the AUKUS treaty and unveiled its series of nuclear submarines to ensure “Australia is well-positioned to tackle the challenges our country and our region face.” These words, from one of Morrison’s press releases, demonstrate a deep commitment to Australian warmongering, both in the Pacific region and elsewhere. For decades now, Australian governments, with support from its western allies, have sought to control the resources available in smaller Pacific countries, at times using its military to enforce control. Similarly, the Liberal party’s commitment to treaties like AUKUS show a resounding endorsement of the global warmongering being committed by Australia’s international allies, particularly the United States.

This warmongering is accompanied by a sinister form of fear mongering against Australia’s perceived enemies. By drumming up the military threat of nations like China, the Liberals not only fill the pockets of Australia and the world’s arms dealers, they also nurture the existing divisions between the various racial sections of the working class. Capitalism is upheld by these divisions, and the Liberals stoke them to keep the working class pitted against each other rather than the ruling class. The Liberal Party’s commitment to militarism goes hand in hand with its commitment to capitalism and oppression •

FEATURE

Abstention *or* Agitation

The Anarchist’s electoral task

THE FEDERAL ELECTION OF 2022 IS UPON US, BUT as revolutionary activists, unionists, and socialists, we know that the only truly positive changes are won on the streets through class conscious struggle.

Kicking the Liberal-National Coalition out of government will make our organising easier, but all governments maintain a brutal regime of economic exploitation and political suppression, pacification, and cooptation. Climate action, wage growth, housing affordability, welfare policy – these are major and urgent questions that the vast majority of voters want addressed. Yet they are hardly even on the agenda this election. We know that ultimately these changes cannot be realised through parliament no matter who forms government in May, and that hopes for electoral reform need to be channelled into the real, material demands of militant grassroots movements.

This is why all socialists must maintain a clear revolutionary perspective. We must continue to encourage mass movement building rather than campaigning for left-wing politicians. As anarchists, we know that the only work which brings us closer to liberation is that which workers organise themselves. We know that centralisation, no matter how benign it seems, breeds corruption, inefficiency, and authoritarianism at the expense of working people’s autonomy. This is why we encourage direct action and direct democracy over representational politics.

ON ELECTIONS

Early anarchists of the 19th century had a profound impact on elections, encouraging and organising powerful mass abstentionist campaigns to challenge the popular legitimacy of the State and the emergent institution of bourgeois liberal democracy.

During this period, full adult suffrage was uncommon, but workers did have the prospect of gaining representation in parliament. In response to this opportunity, anarchists opposed the social-democrats who argued that participation in elections was a vital step for socialists. They argued that the election of workers to parliament would mean the integration of a select number of workers into the bourgeois political regime and would constrain the working-class’ aspirations. In this context, abstention from the vote was a collective assertion of the revolutionary priorities of organised workers. The Paris Commune was a clear model of direct action and workers’ self-management to strive towards, and this made abstention a viable and powerful tactic as it constituted concrete dissent against the state, while also directing workers towards a positive, existing, revolutionary alternative.

In the context of contemporary Australian elections, where parliamentary democracy is firmly established and without a widely understood alternative, a campaign of abstention would be a futile exercise. Our task is instead to rebuild a revolutionary

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vision of society amongst workers and to lay out a clear path towards this vision. Whether anarchists vote, or encourage people to vote is not the point. Our critique of the state is as firm as ever, as is our critique of the parliamentary socialists who seek to win power at the ballot box rather than on the picket line.

EVEN SOCIALIST GOVERNMENTS DON’T CUT IT

The strategic division between social-democrats and revolutionary anarchists and socialists remains fundamentally the same now as it was in the late 19th century. Yet contemporary electoral socialists are substantially less radical than their predecessors.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, it was commonplace for electoral socialist parties like the German SDP to maintain a “minimum/maximum” program, which included both a “minimum” slate of reforms that could be enacted by a social-democratic party within the context of a capitalist political structure, and a “maximum” list of demands that could only be realisable through a transition to socialism outright. In the eyes of its proponents, campaigning around the minimum reforms would at least help the socialist party develop the strength to achieve the maximum and, implicitly, revolutionary goals. This was a gradualist, but not outright reformist approach. Contemporary electoral socialists believe in hardly any of this. At most, they retain the “minimum” set of demands, with nothing more. This frequently leaves them occupying the same political space as the progressive parts of mainstream politics.

On the centre-left, socialist ambition tenuously resides within the aspirational wing of the Labor Party, which seeks to reclaim the glory of the Whitlam years. The election of Gough Whitlam’s Labor government in 1972 saw a major party form government on a platform of radical left-wing reform after decades of right-wing control, a government which then actually implemented many aspects of this platform over the course of its term. This success, however, was infamously short-lived, and followed closely by a series of reactionary counter-reforms which sent union density and militancy into a death spiral. In channelling the energies of activists and unionists into parliament, the rank-and-file movement was demobilised and has been stunted ever since.

On the other hand, the Greens, as a party with a mass, democratic membership structure, are the focus of significant attention from Left activists seeking to bring radical ideas into the mainstream and build popular support for socialist demands and policies. The party is torn, however, between building a mass movement of radical activists and positioning itself as a potential party of government within a Left coalition.

The growing support for the latter direction, and recent anti-democratic strategic decisions taken by the party’s parliamentary leaders, are part of a long-term slide towards political compromise and outright reformism, with even mild reforms unlikely to be achieved in return.

No matter how many seats the Greens or other socialist parties win, their campaigns will fundamentally be mobilising people towards reformism rather than revolution, as the parliamentary road teaches none of its followers the transformative lessons that are learned through union struggle and worker-led direct action. This is why it is not enough to “do both.” Union activity does not negate the conservatising effect of a parliamentary strategy, as parliamentarism inherently separates workers from their political “representatives,” putting them into conflict with each other once a revolutionary moment appears.

As Errico Malatesta explained, “far from encouraging the development of popular consciousness, [parliamentarism] has a tendency to disaccustom the people to the direct care of their own interests. . . . Accustoming the people to delegating to others the winning and defence of its rights is the surest means of giving a free hand to the whims of those who govern.”

ANARCHISTS AND ELECTIONS

As anarchists, we maintain that the best strategic position for socialists is to participate in the class institutions of the proletariat and in the popular causes it supports. It is here that we believe revolutionary socialism has the best chance of prospering, while in the halls of parliament revolutionary ideas suffocate and are lost. In the unions, activist networks, and other working-class bodies, the proletariat doesn’t just have a method of resistance in the present, it also has institutions that could one day take the role of destroying capitalism and constructing free socialism.

We encourage workers to abstain from building electoral campaigns and instead direct all their energies towards building a democratic and militant union movement that can tackle the major issues we presently face. Unions should be striking for pay and working conditions now, not rallying for the Labor Party and waiting for a new government. If this is to happen, we need to be fighting for a drastic reconstruction of the union leadership and challenging the restrictive strike laws that the Labor Party implemented. Similarly, if we are to kick the Liberals out, we must confront them directly. It is not enough to vote, we must kick them from government, from our university campuses, from our communities and from political legitimacy entirely.

THIS ELECTION

The anarchist’s task in this coming election, and the task of any true socialist, is to turn both the optimism and disillusionment brought out by the campaign into revolutionary ambition. In 2022, we do this not by calling for abstention, but through agitation amongst and alongside the electoral campaigns which so many of our fellow workers and socialists are engaged in. An election is a radicalising moment for many people, especially if results favour the Right, and we must seize this moment to make real gains for the broader movements we are building.

We cannot convert this radical potential simply by building a new party to capture the disaffected or by joining the electoral machine. We must instead critique the entire parliamentary system clearly, consistently, and repeatedly. We must continue to mobilise activist and union movements around the urgent material issues facing working people, from housing to wages to climate change. These issues are what lead people to misplace their hope for change in electoralism and parliamentary reform, and should be on the agenda for the current election. Yet even if the Greens were to win power, these issues would not be solved: the cost of living would continue to rise, wages would remain suppressed, and the climate would still be heading into a death spiral, because it is fighting unions and mass social movements which have the power to take on capitalism, not parliaments or politicians.

By keeping the focus on workers’ own organisations and our own priorities, we mobilise people permanently rather than temporarily. Think of the potential in the current public sector strikes being led by rail workers, teachers, nurses and paramedics. These are fights that will stretch well beyond an election, and if workers were united across these industries, with democratic control of their own unions, they could use their combined might to force not only drastic changes in their workplaces, but massive concessions from their common employer – the state – on other issues. Instead of having bureaucrats using union dues to campaign for a right-wing Labor government, workers could use even their limited strike power under current labour law to force action where we need it, regardless of who is in power.

The climate requires such a mobilisation from workers here and around the world. We have less than a year to force the major polluters to change course, and for this we need to build outright green bans in all major unions, with popular demonstrations to back them up. May Day should be a mass rally of unionists calling for a just transition, not a campaign rally for the Labor Party. Workers should be able to form climate action caucuses that have genuine democratic power within their unions. Unions should be using their resources and their influence to bring together various Left forces in a broad alliance for climate justice. The Labor Party is leaving workers behind in a rapidly burning world, and instead of demanding better, union leaders are staying silent to get their party elected.

Queer liberation is another urgent fight that requires consistent mobilisation. There are new attacks on trans people every day, and the struggle for rights like birth certificate reform and gender affirmation leave are only just beginning. For these struggles to spread and to succeed, workers and their organisations need to be solely focused on building power independently of the state. Currently, unions are chained to a party which openly declares its anti-queer priorities and support for

transphobia, and this will not change unless democracy is fought for within all unions and all workplaces. Taking up the fight for transition leave is one way in which workers can begin to reassert control over their own unions, as has been shown by the ongoing campaign in the NTEU being led by casual staff, organised in rank-and-file caucuses. Pride in Protest has also demonstrated how democratic organising within the queer community around self-determined issues can win major concessions from established institutions like the corporate Mardi Gras, while fighting the Liberals and conservatives from below.

This Pride in Protest campaign also shows why the fight against conservatism is not just about kicking the Coalition out of government. Kicking out the Liberals is part of a broader fight against conservatism, nationalism, racism, and all reactionary political ideologies that have roots in various sectors of society. A vote is not enough – we must use our collective force to make conservative ideas wholly unsupportable, to make conservatives unwelcome in working class organisations and communities, and to build class consciousness so that reactionary ideas do not take hold. Labor winning an election will not do this for us. We do this by championing the power of unions and grassroots movements as a fighting, striking force, so that people turn to their fellow workers and not political parties for solutions to social and economic problems.

These are fights that, like many others, the far-left is engaged in every day of the year. Yet when the election brings forth a sudden influx of political energy, this is channelled largely into party structures and election campaigns. It is up to socialists to reverse this trend, not contribute to it by uncritically joining these electoral campaigns or forming our own. A common argument is that socialists can “do both,” but we know that people do not become revolutionaries from an election campaign. We convert aspiration to radicalism by helping people to fight in their workplaces, by inspiring militant direct action on material issues like climate change and queer rights, and by working always towards socialism and away from liberalism and parliamentarism.

In mobilising non-electoral campaigns during the election we reaffirm our revolutionary perspective. Agitation means we stand alongside our comrades and all others calling for an end to the horrific Morrison government, but we do so without claiming that a new government would solve our problems. We must always remind workers of their inherent capacity to self-organise and determine the way society is run, without the interference of any government at all.

CONCLUSION

The call for abstention from anarchists past was not idealistic naivety, and nor are contemporary anarchists ignorant of the “practical reality” of politics. Our call for socialists to maintain their revolutionary perspective is the most realistic and pragmatic view on elections, as we recognise that only direct action can build the revolution. When energy is channelled into a red, green or black electoral campaign, we shift focus away from the real centre of our power as workers, and forego our legitimacy as radical critics of the established order. If workers are to ever unite and cast off their chains, we will not do it at the ballot box, and we will not do it at the behest of a socialist government, we must do it ourselves.



ANALYSIS

The Greens: To the left of Labor, to the right of socialism

THE GREENS ARE THE MOST prominent and successful third force in Australian Federal electoral politics. The height of the Greens’ “success” as an electoral project was when they formed a minority government with Gillard’s Labor Party and a few independents in 2011. In this minority government, the Greens struck a deal to pass the carbon tax, later to be repealed under Tony Abbott after the next election. As Labor has rapidly shed membership due to its turn to neoliberalism and lurch to the right on social issues such as immigration and women’s and LGBTQ rights, the Greens have defined themselves as the sole “progressive force” of Australian electoral politics.

It is worth analysing the Greens - both the party membership and its policy - through their history and class character. Like any large-scale party, the Greens have a number of internal contradictions. This is partly due to the Greens forming separately in different states before federating and the differences in those state branches’ politics. Pro-business environmentalists exist within the green movement and greens parties around the world, and the Australian Greens are no exception. In fact, in Tasmania, where a number of Federal Greens leaders, including Bob Brown, have their base, the Greens once governed alongside a Liberal government. They were the teal independents of their own time.

We should not dismiss these contradictions and liberal influences within the Greens, but we should also not equate them to environmentalist Liberals, or consider them as plainly liberal as the Labor party. This confusion about the class character of the Greens in its membership is perpetuated by Labor, whose supporters will often dismiss the Greens as being “tree Tories”. When it suits them, however, Labor will also attack the Greens for being too left-wing and not voting for “practical solutions.”

While we as socialists should criticise the Greens’ electoral project, this critique does not dismiss them as homogeneously middle-class in the same way Labor does when they want to position themselves to the left of the Greens. While the Greens do not heavily represent the industrial working class, their working class base is mostly made up of the workers that previously occupied Labor’s left wing faction – teachers, nurses, etc.: Industries that consist disproportionately of

feminised labour and are more likely to exist in inner cities.

In its federal expression, the Greens clearly represent a more left-wing party than Labor. Greens voters overwhelmingly preference Labor, more so than any other minor party of meaningful influence, and union membership of Greens party members sits well above the national average. While the Greens have their own contradictions, their membership should be understood as a left-wing split from Labor.

It is the membership that pressures the party to adopt progressive policies, and its membership attracts a high number of left-wing activists, but the gap

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between the membership and the party room should be emphasised. How much power is centralised in MPs varies from state to state, and is often contingent on the historical nature of the parties, tactics, and issues the state branches grew from. The Tasmanian Greens largely developed around elected independent’s offices, whereas in NSW it was from a left-wing reading group of socialists and former Labor members, who were turfed from the Labor party for supporting a socialist candidate. But even if members state by state vary in their willingness to have the party room centralise control, it is an inevitable structure of the Federal party. It is no surprise that Tasmanian Greens dominated the Federal party room for a long time – they cut their teeth on the conservative politics of the party room and isolation from membership or grassroots democracy and organisation. The party room has come into conflict with socialist members of the party - an example is when then-leader Richard Di Natale chastised a socialist faction emerging in NSW, stating clearly that “the overthrow of capitalism is a ridiculous notion.”

It is also from this membership/leadership divide that we see a clear

difference between the party room and the membership in strategic orientation. It is the party room and MPs who want to orient the party around the “centre of politics” and aim for a governing coalition to put them in the balance of power. The reality of this is not the achievement of a full social democratic agenda, but the trading of very small pieces of “progress” (like market-based climate change policies) for a larger project of providing supply and confidence for a neoliberal party – most likely Labor. All of this seriously poses the threat of providing “left cover” for a government that still undertakes cuts, rorts and the squeezing of the working

class, as we saw under the Gillard government which governed with the Greens as a coalition partner.

In the minds of the voting public, the Greens represent the space of social democracy that had been vacated by Labor in their rightward shift, but in reality it is incredibly fragile. It is a paper social democracy that is not supported by the backbone of a strong workers movement. It is wrong to think that because the Greens do not have the formal relationships that Labor has with the union bureaucracy that this makes their membership less union based, but it is also not a party that is ultimately responsible to the union and workers movement either in its form or expression. This is why the dream of some right-wing Greens to form government is doomed to reformism and is a woeful path for any left-wing Greens member to adhere to. A fairer, better world is won through building the strength of the workers movement, not by acting as either a ginger group to, or active coalition partner of, the Labor party •

ANALYSIS

Teal is a Shade of Blue: Why Climate Independents are Liberals by Another Name

EVER SINCE THE ELECTION of independent candidate Zali Steggall in the federal seat of Warringah, dethroning former Prime Minister Tony Abbott from parliament, there has been a flurry of candidates professing themselves to be part of a movement - that of the climate independents.

Zali Steggall ran on a campaign of “climate action” sharply contrasted with the track record of Tony Abbott, who famously came to power in 2011 after campaigning to “Axe the (Carbon) Tax” of the preceding Labor government. Steggall won in a massive swing against Abbott and inspired others to challenge blue-ribbon seats. There tends to be something that unites these independents’ campaigns however: the seats they target are held by Liberals; they are not seeking to reap up disaffected or current Labor voters (and good luck with the Greens). The reason they can win Liberal voters is because they’re Liberals, just without the party affiliation.

Steggall’s target of net zero by 2050 and 60% on 2005 levels by 2030 places her in front of Labor by a small margin, and behind the Greens by a fair distance. With the Murdoch press endorsing net zero by 2050, this is hardly a paragon of swift action on the climate. In fact, Steggall proudly brandishes a quote by the Business Council of Australia (the association for bosses) on her climate change policy document. That’s because the Bill she puts forward does not in fact compel industry to do anything. It is intended to guide governments in a bipartisan manner (read: in a way that doesn’t ever actually upset capital). Her Bill is so far from reigning in capital to stop climate change that Steggall has followed Labor in even abandoning a Federal carbon tax or emissions trading scheme. Not that we think those ‘cap and trade’ policies are ever truly effective, but when these independents are less left wing than 2009 Julia Gillard on climate change, they can hardly be considered our silver bullet.

Once you read through what Steggall is actually proposing to do to reach this middling net zero/60% reduction by 2030, the frustration starts, as we are reminded of the constant failure over the past 30 years to reach a satisfactory solution under capitalism. It’s not subsidies for fossil fuel bosses now - it’s subsidies for businesses! The policy

relies on electric vehicles replacing petrol cars in ten years by merely giving payouts to producers. Anyone with a passing look at Tesla’s business model will see the unmitigated disaster this turns out to be, as these companies are more concerned with pocketing profits than spreading clean and affordable transport to the public.

But perhaps the sickest, darkest, proposal that pulls the veil on the whole thing is this sentence, in the section about land regeneration and agriculture: “with emerging domestic and international capital markets for carbon credits and offsets, the CSIRO estimates that returns to farmers and landowners could be as high as \$114 billion per annum by 2060.” Not only is the land and water of this country already horrifically privatised, but the idea of creating a market for those private landowners to exploit a global system of polluters would mean profiting off climate change inaction. Given the recent revelation by the ABC that Australia’s carbon offset credits programme is almost entirely corrupt, this perfectly sums up climate independents as Liberals: “we want our activity to be carbon neutral, neutral in the sense that we are fine for the pollution to be happening somewhere else.”

That they are capitalists through and through means they are doomed to make the same mistakes of the Labor party in eventually getting wedged about questions on “what about the coal miners’ jobs?”. Steggall’s response to this question is that, well, actually, the green economy is going to create so many new jobs that it’s ultimately a net positive for the unemployed pool. So her plan for workers who are put out appears to be “fuck you, and hey, good luck out there.”

Steggall, and other climate independents are simply another face of a tired and worn out idea that we’ve seen many times before, starting in the 80s with Ted Mack, so-called “father of the independents,” whose “independent” protégés included Clover Moore. Fast forward a few election cycles and, in between supporting police raids on Occupy Sydney and promoting bicycle lanes, Moore has built an empire of local “independents” under the Clover Team, which has born spin-offs such as Alex Greenwich (the state member for Sydney), and Kerryn Phelps, briefly member for Wentworth. Kerryn Phelps’ campaign manager, Damian

Hodgkinson, would go on to manage the finances of Zali Steggall’s campaign and eventually Climate 200, where he would solicit corporate donations for “climate independents.”

That these people are hostile to the Left can be seen on the smallest scale as they intervene in social movement debates. Damien Hodgkinson, for example, campaigned against Mardi Gras members voting for a climate change motion at the 2018 AGM. Climate 200 has already denounced climate campaigners doing direct action. Kerryn Phelps has criticised Indigenous people for protesting land theft and domestic violence leave for hurting small businesses. Julia Banks mocks arguments by unemployed unionists that people need more than \$40 a day to live on. And all pose left on queer rights, climate action, refugees, anti-corruption, and (white) feminism, while not only refusing to support meaningful reforms but outright despising the people who fight for these reforms.

That any of these campaigners have a see-through progressivism doesn’t need to be belaboured by us. The Australian Financial Review said of Moore that she “governs like a capitalist and campaigns as a Green.” Her political chum Alex Greenwich provides supply and confidence to the NSW Liberal government, as Moore provided supply and confidence to a corrupt NSW Liberal government in the 90s. Often, this supply and confidence is granted in an unconscionable and opportunistic trade for the passing of a single bill that the independent will have made their pet issue. While some of these bills are commendable, such as the recent decriminalisation of abortion in NSW, the horse trading for the rest of the Liberal agenda is a small target strategy which puts all governments into right wing drift.

Leftists should not be fooled by the governing to the right /campaigning to the left sleight of hand of climate independents. There is a vacuum of anti-Liberal and anti-political sentiment that they desperately wish to fill, that the corporate media can count on as a safe ally. At minimum, no serious leftist would ever provide supply and confidence to a Liberal government, and trade off everyone’s welfare for the smallest reform. That is, at heart, why climate independents are a petty faction of the Liberal party •

ANALYSIS

The Labor Party: Hunting for a ‘red wall’ of anti-woke voters

AS WE TRUDGE CLOSER AND closer to the polls for the 2022 federal election, we are left asking several important questions about the Australian Labor Party (ALP), like: Who are you? Why are you talking to me? And, what the fuck are you on about? Helpfully, Anthony Albanese has been trying to answer that with a loosely-assembled, centre-right policy suite peppered with stories about how he lived in public housing 40 years ago. The media calls this a small target strategy, but most workers will see this as business as usual for one of the world’s oldest Labor parties. This “small target” strategy is cover for the severe lack of any left-wing policy agenda, and queer rights, refugees, and climate action are its biggest failures.

The Labor policy suite

Anti-trans, anti-queer, and anti-woke
Despite the incredible momentum the queer rights movement gained during the marriage equality plebiscite, the lesson that Labor took from this triumph was not that there was an overwhelming mass of support for queer rights amongst millions of working people, but that the working class, immigrant-background, ‘No’ voting electorates of South and Western Sydney hated queers. Astonishingly, Labor believes that their effort in platforming queer rights during this period is why they lost the last federal election, and in the hope of increasing their vote in marginal electorates, why they have since deleted almost every mention of queer issues from their policy platform.

This informs the approach that Labor took to the Religious Discriminations Bill, and the horrible right wing media interviews they have done presenting trans rights as a fringe, “woke” issue. While a handful of Labor MPs internally argued to “kill the bill,” Labor have instead proposed a suite of amendments to the Religious Discrimination Bill and the Sex Discrimination Act and seem committed to passing the bill should they win the election, despite mass opposition to it, and the concurrent Liberal Party implosion for nominating an anti-trans extremist who refers to queer people as the “Rainbow Reich.” A consistent position to kill the bills could seriously pressure the Liberals, but Labor has refused to take a stand even against extremists.

The sequel that nobody wanted: the return of “stop the boats”
Of course, the racism doesn’t end with Labor’s mythos about Western Sydney being anti-queer. It has formed part of their perspective on borders and nationalism from the beginning. Mandatory detention was first implemented under Keating and then expanded by every Labor- and Liberal-led government until today, where companies owned by politicians’ mates run offshore concentration camps.

Labor’s position on Temporary Protection visas (TPVs) has led many refugee groups to give their support to Albanese this election, but the ALP’s position on refugee rights is damning and inhumane in every other respect. The New Zealand deal which Labor is celebrating will see most remaining refugees languish in detention for a number of years, and they are so determined to not be wedged by the Liberals on border security that Albanese made it an election issue when no one else was talking about it, just to desperately clarify that yes, he is still planning to deny asylum to refugees.

area. Wedged between climate strikes, blockaders, Stop Adani, and the Greens on one side, and corporations on the other, Labor brought a non-position to the federal election and was obliterated in Queensland. Meanwhile, the Greens’ vote increased.

This time there is no uncertainty. Labor has been clear that they are not prioritising the environment. They’ve ruled out getting rid of coal; their position on carbon emissions would see peoples’ homes burn and flood; they want to open a new taxpayer-funded gas-fired power plant in Kurri Kurri. The list goes on. The Labor Party holds this position because they ultimately believe that workers are a culturally conservative force, and that the best way to help workers is to promise them jobs in declining industries, despite the clear majority of the working population wanting more action on climate change.

Besties with the bosses, slaying the poor
Since the 2019 election, Albanese has been watering down more than just climate action.

“Astonishingly, Labor believes that their effort in platforming queer rights during this period is why they lost the last federal election, and in the hope of increasing their vote in marginal electorates, why they have since deleted almost every mention of queer issues from their policy platform.”

For bosses or workers? Labor on the environment
The Labor Party has a long history of wedging itself on the environment as it tries to juggle workers’ interests with the desires of the bosses. This happened under Rudd and Gillard, when Labor imploded over trying to pass a regressive cap and trade climate reform that wouldn’t antagonise business (the infamous ETS), and they did it again with the carbon price. In 2019, Queensland Labor Premier Palaszczuk and federal Nationals Minister for Resources Canavan forced through approval of the Adani mine in the Galilee Basin, knowing that it would destroy local water tables and wildlife populations, and offer no jobs to the local

He has also been singing from the rooftops that he wants to be closer to business, rather than unions. While Labor’s promises last election, like the industrial relations reforms, pay increases for early childhood educators, and a review of JobKeeper, were unambitious, they were still miles ahead of what Labor offers this time. The ALP has yet again refused to raise JobSeeker or end mutual obligations. They have called for ratios for aged care workers but no pay increase, and their claim to make early childhood education policy more affordable is almost identical to LNP policy. These weak and piecemeal policies will do little for workers struggling with the cost of living, as it rises higher than this country has seen in decades.

Labor’s conservative-worker myth

When traditionally working class, safe Labour seats voted for Brexit in 2016 and fell to the Conservatives in 2017, UK Labour debated whether the primary factor in this swing was wealth inequality, or a kind of ingrained cultural conservatism in these working class areas. Similar debates took place around the time of Trump’s election.

“The Labor Party was not a socialist project in the past any more than it is now. It has degenerated, but we cannot assume that it is only the problems of today which make it unfixable. Of course, this does not entail sectarian hostility to socialists who dream of recreating the Whitlam era through the Labor Party. But we should be clear to them that it is not just the landscape which Labor finds itself in now which makes this impossible, but the foundational myth of the party that places too much emphasis on our ability to win true equality through electoralism.”

This myth in Australia has coalesced around western Sydney and regional Queensland and has dreamt up a constituency of deeply right-wing supporters of the Labor Party who are sympathetic to the Liberals or even One Nation. The obsession with these constituencies has created a policy race to the bottom to appease the “quiet Australians” who allegedly fill these areas, though the evidence for these people existing as a mass force is quite minimal. This myth was promoted in the ALP’s review of its own 2019 election campaign, which argued that first generation immigrant Christians, coal mining communities, the economically insecure, and Chinese Australians are the pillars of this demographic, a demographic which has rejected Labor in favour of the right. The report suggests that coal mining communities were antagonised by Labor’s closeness to the Greens and its ambiguity on Adani, that the poor were antagonised by “identity politics,” and that Chinese people and Christians were antagonised by Labor’s policies on queer rights and abortion.

The truth of these conclusions is doubtful, given there is generally high support amongst Labor members and

supporters for the policy platform of the Greens in any given election. The vast majority of voters support the rights of trans kids and teachers, desire real action on climate change, and want an increase to JobSeeker. The only time Labor won a majority government in the last 29 years was with a policy to end mandatory detention. It is thus unclear why Labor thinks opposing trans rights instead of increasing welfare would encourage poor voters to support them.

What is clear, however, is that Labor has fashioned a deeply conservative policy strategy out of this shibboleth.

I can still fix him, right?

While the current trajectory of the Labor Party may seem a misguided, off-course turn of events, these failures are fundamental to the Labor Party project from its origin. Labor was born from demoralised labour elements seeking the ability to arbitrate with bosses and gain a broader say in society. In its infancy, the party courted broader layers of support which included small shop owners, the Catholic Church, and the liquor industry, creating an internal contradiction which led to instability and constant splits. Even Whitlam’s Labor, considered the peak of the party’s left-wing potential, fell to this instability. Splitters of the Democratic Labor Party (now represented within the ALP by the right-wing boss’s union, the SDA) blocked Whitlam’s budget, sparking the spiral which led to his sacking. Furthermore, Whitlam and Labor were so wedded to electoralism in place of direct action that they refused to defend themselves from the coup and called for

patience in anticipation of the election campaign (which they lost), despite popular outrage, protests, and calls for strikes to overturn the sacking. The Labor Party was not a socialist project in the past any more than it is now. It has degenerated, but we cannot assume that it is only the problems of today which make it unfixable. Of course, this does not entail sectarian hostility to socialists who dream of recreating the Whitlam era through the Labor Party. But we should be clear to them that it is not just the landscape which Labor finds itself in now which makes this impossible, but the foundational myth of the party that places too much emphasis on our ability to win true equality through electoralism.

The future under our favourite landlord, ol’ mate Albo?

At time of writing, the polls suggest the race for Prime Minister remains tight, and serious contests by Greens and teal Independents in the lower house make minority governments more likely than in the past. Psephologists also predict that One Nation and the Coalition will be able to block all bills on their own if certain Senate races are tight. It would be a setback for working class morale if the Liberals manage to cling to power for yet another term, and so it’s preferable that Albanese win. But a win for Labor on one of its most right-wing platforms under a conservative Senate is not the kind of victory even the most electoral-minded worker would find pleasure in. Labor never becomes more left-wing after winning office, and they will likely use One Nation’s Senate presence as the perfect excuse to abandon even their most basic commitments, like scrapping TPVs and the cashless debit card, introducing ratios into aged care, and protecting trans kids from expulsion at school. None of these reforms can be taken for granted. Rather, they will inevitably require struggle from below - even under a Labor government - and signed deals with the Greens and Independents cannot replace this struggle.

To force Labor further left and impose greater reforms will require serious social force from us as workers. We will need the same grit and persistence that saw the queer rights movement smash the Liberals on marriage equality, and use that to fan the flames in our unions to organise and strike to change society •



What is Black Flag Sydney?

Black Flag Sydney is a collective of anarchist-communist workers who organise mainly on unceded Gadigal land.

Our ultimate goal is to build a society free of states, classes and currency, in order to achieve collective self-emancipation and universal freedom for all. Direct action is our method and worker self-management is our vision for today and the future.

We aim not only to dismantle systems of capitalist exploitation, but to build the capacity for people to freely and truly self-manage their workplaces, communities, and lives.

MUTINY!