

The Greens: mainstream party or minor irritant?

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Tonight I wish to commence by reflecting on the disrepute that attaches to politicians and the political process. So, when at the outset I pay my respects to the Gadigal people of the Eora nation on whose land we are meeting, I am conscious of how often those words are mouthed, but how infrequently they are given substance. Kevin Rudd's apology to indigenous people, when placed in the context of the Labor Government's subsequent endorsement of the Northern Territory intervention, suspension of the Anti-Discrimination Act and quarantining of welfare payments - exemplifies the cynical gulf that exists between what governments say and what they do.

I wish to begin by examining some of the possible causes for the disrepute into which politics has fallen and the disengagement this has produced. I should say at the outset that these views are my own, developed in part from a long-term inherited disposition to radical politics, and in part from seven years' first-hand observation of mainstream parliamentary politics in action -- not exactly an edifying experience. I hope that some, at least, of my colleagues agree with my views, but in no way should my opinions be construed as anything other than the thoughts of one member of The Greens.

In the United States and most European countries, where voting is not compulsory, there has been a steady decline in the number of people voting at elections. Significantly, this trend was reversed in the 2008 U.S.

Presidential elections when the turnout was the highest in 40 years. But even in Australia where voting compulsory voting masks any decline in voter participation, the Australian Electoral Commission estimates there are nearly 1,400,000 eligible voters who are not on the electoral roll, and these are mainly in the 18-39 age group.¹ Voting in many ways is the lowest form of politics. All that is required is to turn up every 4 years and mark a piece of paper. More than ever, political engagement has become the preserve of a minority. One of the challenges for The Greens is to evolve alternative institutions that would give meaning to politics in a broader sense.

The decline of formal engagement with politics, both in voter turnout and in political party membership, has been accompanied by social democrat parties generally accepting – or at least failing to confront – free market economics where government regulation is reduced to a minimum. Challenges to the assumptions underlying neo-liberalism and economic rationalism have been sporadic and somewhat half-hearted.

In the aftermath of the Great Depression and two world wars, free market capitalism lost credibility. Regulation of capital was accepted and the so-called mixed economy was seen as the way forward. As the post-war boom slowed in the 1970s in the face of the first and second oil shocks and the emergence stagflation, social democrat parties abandoned any meaningful commitment to regulating capital and moved to a more open support of market economics. The Hawke-Keating Labor governments from 1983 until 1996 epitomised this trend and floated the currency, handed interest rate

¹ *Daily Telegraph*, Sydney, 15 March 2010, pp10-11

controls to the Reserve Bank, began the move away from a centralised wage fixing system, and privatised key institutions such as the Commonwealth Bank.

In advanced capitalist countries, intellectual resistance to such policies was further weakened by revelations about the realities of life in the Soviet Union and its satellites. This loss of confidence contributed to the inability or unwillingness on the part of the Left to counter claims that government intervention to promote a more just or more equal society was both counter-productive and inherently undesirable. The global financial crisis has, however, comprehensively challenged if not repudiated entirely assertions that market forces should be left to regulate themselves, that good government is synonymous with small government, and that the role of government, as Kevin Rudd put it, is 'simply to enforce contracts and protect the allocation of property rights'.²

Rather than my rebutting such claims – particularly as there are so many others far better qualified who have done so, I will turn my attention to the way in which politics has been debased by the same arguments and assumptions that underlie neo-liberalism. In doing so, I am drawing extensively on Colin Hay's book, *Why We Hate politics*,³ published in 2007. The book's focus is on Europe and the United States, but many of Hay's observations are equally relevant here.

Neo-liberalism is premised on the assumption that individuals will always act rationally and seek to maximise their own self-interest, and that, when

² K Rudd, 'The Global Financial Crisis', February 2009, 42 <http://www.themonthly.com.au/monthly-essays-kevin-rudd-global-financial-crisis--1421>

³ C Hay, *Why We Hate Politics*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2007

adopting any course of action, rational self-interest will be the prime motivator. This assumption, when placed in a political context, leads to the conclusion that the policies with the greatest appeal are likely to be those that deliver maximum, immediately tangible benefits to the individual voter. Identifying those policies involves dissecting the entrails of focus groups and divining the credibility of opinion polls and surveys. The origination and refining of policies becomes a matter of marketing, and delivering them to electors in the most effective manner is the task of advertising agencies.

As a consequence of espousing a neo-Liberal view of the world, policy generation by political parties no longer consists of standing for and defending consistently argued philosophical positions, but rather of fashioning strategies to appeal to the preferences of targeted voters. It becomes a question of tinkering with the status quo -- of not whether the Medicare Rebate is inherently inconsistent with the provision of universal quality health care, but rather a matter of arguing about where the rebate should cut in.

Policies that require commitment to established and recognised principles and the sidelining of perceived or immediate self-interest are dismissed as old-fashioned irrelevancies - whether it be privatisation of waste utilities, of prisons, or Snowy Hydro. The alleged superiority of private ownership, of efficiencies resulting from market competition and the elimination of red tape trump broader public interest justifications for retaining critical government services in public hands.

Inevitably this means that elections are fought on an increasingly narrow range of issues. We end up with depoliticised politics. Recently former

Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser was asked what Liberal Party founder Robert Menzies would think of today's Liberal and Labor parties. Fraser replied,

'Well he wouldn't recognise today's Labor Party. I suspect he'd welcome the fact that they've changed enormously and are no longer socialist. The socialist left. Well, what's that? They privatise, they believe in capitalism, they believe in a fair go for workers. Now, putting it in those blunt terms, both parties would agree with those sorts of statements. The debate today ought to be one about competence.'⁴

Dominic Knight, an original member of The Chaser team, summed it up a week ago when speculating about the source of Kevin Rudd's popularity:

'With the Opposition [under Turnbull] not really taking the fight to Rudd – chiefly because moderate Liberal and conservative Labor politicians agree on almost everything except unions nowadays – Turnbull essentially made Rudd look good, and particularly during Utegate'.⁵

In his February 2009 essay in *The Monthly*, Kevin Rudd attacked the failings of neo-liberalism and rejected 'the extreme capitalism and unrestrained greed that have perverted so much of the global financial system in recent times'.⁶ It is difficult, however, when examining the record of the Rudd government to detect a whole-hearted departure from neo-liberalist economic prescriptions, other than government intervention to shore up the banks by government guarantee of deposits. Nor can one discern significant differences from many Howard Government policies. For example, Howard's Pacific solution has become Rudd's Indian Ocean solution, the publication of school league tables implies a concept of education predicated upon market choice, the insulation fiasco is largely attributable to reliance on an unregulated market to regulate itself, and the coercive powers against building unions remain in place. Most importantly, there has been a failure to

⁴ M Fraser, interview, 7.30 Report, 23 February 2010, <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2010/s2828288.htm>

⁵ D Knight, 'The puzzling popularity of Kevin Rudd', 13 March 2010, <http://www.domknight.com/the-puzzling-popularity-of-kevin-rudd/>

⁶ K Rudd, 'The Global Financial Crisis', February 2009, 42 <http://www.themonthly.com.au/monthly-essays-kevin-rudd-global-financial-crisis--1421>

introduce meaningful measures to counter climate change, the government preferring instead to rely on dubious technology in the form of carbon capture and storage and a market-based emissions trading scheme.

Moreover, the government's abandonment of the field has delivered a bogus credibility to climate skeptics. Climate change has been consigned to the 'too hard' basket.

But, once policy issues are eliminated from political debate, then elections and media coverage become simply a matter of which party is the better manager of the status quo or which leader projects the more engaging image. But electors are in no position to judge issues of trust, personal competence or leadership skills. Endless media speculation about an individual's personal qualities does not make for meaningful political engagement with the electorate. Voters quite rightly are turned off by baby kissing. Unfortunately, the more serious are also turned off political engagement.

Of course, focus upon an individual's personal qualities and image has its downside when, for example, when preselections and elections are won or lost on the strength of a politician's personal indiscretions. But the more worrying consequence is a more general loss of trust in elected officials. Public uneasiness about the moral shortcomings of politicians is, of course, not allayed by perceptions of the influence exercised by well-placed political donations.

The denigration of the notion that participation in politics is for anything other than self-interested purposes has other implications. So widespread has that view become that politicians cannot be trusted, that politicians themselves subscribe to it. They accept their supposed incapacity to make

decisions in the broader public interest and accordingly outsource those decisions. How often do we read of governments and oppositions proposing to delegate political functions to unelected Authorities whose decisions are shielded from public scrutiny because they are supposedly made by apolitical experts. Hay quotes from a speech by Charles Falconer, close friend of Tony Blair and former British Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs,

‘What governs our approach is a clear desire to place power where it should be: increasingly not with politicians, but with those best fitted in different ways to deploy it. Interest rates are not set by politicians in the Treasury, but by the Bank of England. Minimum wages are not determined by the Department of Trade and Industry, but by the Low Paid Commission. ... This depoliticisation of key decision-making is a vital element in bringing power closer to the people’.⁷

We have only to look around to see how the outsourcing of political responsibility has played out in Australia. The Reserve Bank is free of government control, but its decisions on interest rates have profound effects on public policy in this country. The responsibility for the welfare of a large section of the population has been outsourced to private financial consultants and superannuation funds. At the State level, publicly accountable, elected local councils have had their powers transferred to unaccountable, unelected planning panels. The usurpation of planning powers has not only empowered private certifiers to make essentially political decisions, but it has been accompanied by a loss from the public sector of accumulated knowledge and expertise.

Clearly such a process may pay dividends for parties whose focus is solely on winning and remaining in office. It removes the need to develop and defend policies that respond to the needs of groups within the community. It avoids

⁷ Hay, p.93

accountability for decisions that are deeply political in nature. It cloaks the choices made and the justifications for those choices in secrecy, and it effectively eliminates public scrutiny.

So, is this somewhat jaundiced view of the state of Australian politics shared by the electorate? Have the policies and approaches of the major parties converged to the extent that voters do not distinguish between them? It seems not.

Academics commonly make use of a left-right spectrum to analyse voter opinion and attitudes. For more than 40 years, voters have been asked to locate both themselves and the political parties along that spectrum. As Associate Professor David Charnock of Curtin University notes in a June 2009 article in the *Australian Journal of Political Science*, survey evidence from 1967 to 2007 demonstrates that ‘although the levels and strength of party identification with the ALP and Liberal-National coalition have decreased somewhat over the period, it has not been by very large amounts’.⁸ The major parties have attracted a combined first preference vote of between 80 and 85 per cent in the House of Representatives and 75 to 80 per cent in the Senate. Charnock’s point is that that the Australian party system is structured around two main party voting blocs, one of which voters perceive to be overall more left-wing, and the other more right-wing.⁹ Moreover, Australian voters overwhelmingly locate themselves in the centre and right portions of the left-right spectrum.¹⁰

⁸ D Charnock, ‘Can the Australian Greens Replace the Australian Democrats as a “Third Party” in the Senate?’, *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 44 (2), June 2009, p.246

⁹ Ibid, p.253

¹⁰ Ibid, 247

What does this mean for The Greens? As Professor Geoffrey Hawker outlines in an article entitled 'Growing the Greens' in the *Australian Quarterly*, which also appeared in June 2009, The Greens have had more than 20 years in which to establish a constituency but they 'remain very largely "locked up" in the upper Houses where they can at best play a balancing role, like the Australian Democrats before them'.¹¹ Hawker attributes this in large part to the preferential system of voting that prevails in most Australian lower house elections. He goes on to point out that the Australian Democrats were once in a similar position to that of The Greens, 'and look what happened to them?'

Most commentators would attribute the eventual implosion of the Democrats to internal dissension within the party's upper echelons, numerous changes in leadership and, perhaps most pivotal of all, the disbelief and disenchantment of rank-and-file members at the parliamentary party's decision to support the GST. Does a similar fate await The Greens should its parliamentary leadership diverge significantly from its membership on particular issues? Is the comparison with the Democrats a fair one?

To answer that question one must look at the very different origins of the parties. The Democrats emerged as a splinter group within the Liberal Party and enjoyed parliamentary representation from the outset. They were essentially a parliamentarist party whose avowed purpose was to 'keep the bastards honest', to scrutinise the activities of the major parties rather than to critique or fundamentally alter the status quo. In an interview on Radio National's Background Briefing a few years ago, then Senator Natasha Stott-

¹¹ G. Hawker, 'Growing the Greens', *Australian Quarterly*, 81 (3), May-June 2009, p.12

Despoya stated that the main role of the Democrats was to support 'better legislation'. I'm not sure if I know of any party demanding worse legislation. Her claim is simply banal and assumes that all a government needs is good bureaucrats. Unlike The Greens, the Democrats never developed a strong grass-roots base or significant involvement in extra-parliamentary political movements. As Hawker notes, 'The Greens began as a social movement and for many activists in the early years it was a serious question whether that movement would orient to parliamentary representation or remain a free and mobile force influencing politics in a different way'. Indeed, in the 1980s, a popular slogan of French and German Greens was 'neither left nor right but ahead'.¹²

It has been argued that the Democrats survived by attracting a wider range of supporters than dissident Liberals could supply and that they found this in a segment of the community frequently characterised as 'postmaterialist'. Post-materialists were, in Hawker's words, 'more youthful, more female, more urban, more educated and more aligned to the values of humanitarianism than voters of an earlier generation'.¹³ It has also been asserted that post-materialist voters cannot be adequately characterised in terms of left or right political orientation and shun the very thought of being so described.

The Australian Greens draw their adherents from a similar demographic base to that which supported the Democrats. Are they therefore equally likely to alienate that base by espousing policies that appear distant from the environmental concerns that gave rise to the party? There has been no

¹² See I Bludhdon & J Szarka, 'Managing Strategic Positioning Choices: A Reappraisal of the Development Paths of the French and German Green Parties', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 12(3), December 2004, pp303-319. The article examines the difficulties Green parties in France and Germany experienced when in coalition government.

¹³ *Ibid*, p.13.

shortage of attacks on The Greens on this score. They have been reviled for failing to focus exclusively on environmental issues and at the same time castigated for being a single-issue party. There has been abundant media speculation about the allegedly watermelon nature of some Greens – green on the outside but deepest red in the centre – and their differences with ‘Deep’ Greens, that is, traditional environmental activists.

Haydon Manning, in an *Australian Quarterly* article in May-June 2002 entitled ‘The Australian Greens and the handicap of left legacies’ articulated this view. He took issue with Bob Brown’s remarks at the 2001 campaign launch when Bob argued for ‘politics with humanity’ and spoke of ‘travelling with other politicians to Pakistan and Indonesia to investigate the refugee situation.’ Manning contends that ‘this set the tone for the Greens campaign which focused more upon moral indignation over the treatment of “boat people” and questioning defence links to the United States than on environmental issues.’¹⁴

Manning also deplores what he described as a ‘potentially unwelcome legacy of 2001’, namely the influx of new members from among dissatisfied Labor members. He instances union leader Dean Mighel’s resignation from the ALP on the grounds that ‘the Greens offered more pro-union policies and a superior social justice stance’. Manning concedes that this ‘is not an unreasonable observation’ but remarks that ‘it is unusual for a unionist, particularly one with blue-collar pedigree, to support the Greens given the

¹⁴ H Manning, ‘The Australian Greens and the handicap of left legacies’ *Australian Quarterly* 74 (3), May-June 2002, p.19

recent history of disagreement between unions and the Greens over jobs before environmental protection issues,' and warns that 'minor parties are particularly vulnerable to take-over by politically experienced ex-Labor Party members associated with its left wing'. Manning suggests that such a development would further undermine the Greens' electoral appeal and 'do little to advance debate on the nation's pressing environmental problems'.¹⁵

Natalie Sloan and William J. Lines are also critical of the direction in which Greens policies have evolved. In an article entitled 'Party of Principle? The Greens and Population Policy' they argue that

'Originally promulgated in 1995, the party's population policy was revised in 1998 and again in 2002. With each revision the Greens altered their principles, lessened their commitment to limiting population growth, and increasingly emphasised technology and human ingenuity as the solution to the problem of ensuring ecological sustainability. They replaced concern about population and environmental degradation with a social justice, global human rights platform. Subsequently they increased their vote – but chiefly among a narrow, elite segment of the electorate: the most highly educated.'¹⁶

How justified are such criticisms? Do The Greens risk alienating their support base by deviating from specifically environmental issues?¹⁷

In answering this, I would like to return to David Charnock's 2009 essay.

There seems little disagreement about the Greens' ability to attract postmaterialist voters. Ronald Inglehart was the first to describe this cohort,

¹⁵ It's worth noting here the emphasis The Greens place on the creation of new 'green jobs' as a response to assertions that it's either jobs or the environment. The Greens do not see the issues as mutually exclusive.

¹⁶ Sloan, N., & Lines, W. 'Party of principle? The Greens and population policy', *People and Place*, 11(2), 2003, pp16–23

¹⁷ The Greens' current population policy emphasises both population control *and* consumption. Moreover, The Greens examine global populations, poverty and consumption, rather than focusing solely on the numbers of immigrants to one country, namely Australia.

'While there are some differences in emphasis at different time, [Inglehart's] argument is essentially that there has been a change in value orientations that has political (and other social) consequences because "in the postmodernization phase of development, emphasis shifts from maximizing economic gains to maximizing subjective well-being" and this results in the prioritisation of a range of issues such as environmental protection, abortion, ethnic diversity, women's issues and gay and lesbian emancipation'.¹⁸

Charnock details empirical research conducted over the last 10-15 years that indicates 'that the attitudes and values associated with this new politically relevant postmaterialist or postmodern dimension have been found to be fairly strongly correlated in many countries with those on the left-right dimension'.¹⁹ He concludes that 'one practical effect of this correlation is to make discussions of strategy and tactics based on a single left-right dimension more useful and relevant than would otherwise be the case'.²⁰

Simply put, the issues to which The Greens attach so much importance are the same issues that motivate many people to vote for The Greens, and those people locate themselves at the left of the political spectrum. 'Greens voters are both the most left-wing and the most postmaterialist; coalition voters are the most right-wing and least postmaterialist; and ALP voters are in-between on both dimensions, although closer to The Greens on the left-right scale'.²¹ Even if one looks at specific issues such as environmentalism, cultural permissiveness, indigenous and migrant issues, defence and security, postmaterialist voters identify with values commonly associated with the left of the political spectrum.

¹⁸ Charnock, p.246

¹⁹ Ibid p.247

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid p.250

The challenge for The Greens is to embrace this reality and devise campaigns whose purpose is to increase and solidify support for the party among left-wing voters with whom The Greens already have so much in common. Labor and Liberal have effectively colonised the centre, it's the left where The Greens stand to make the greatest advances.

What other implications are there for The Greens? Despite its grassroots base, it is possible that The Greens, other than in exceptional circumstances, will receive no more than 10 to 15 per cent of first preference votes in lower house elections. There clearly are exceptions, Tasmania being a case in point, where the latest estimate is that The Greens will receive 21.3 per cent of the vote and, as a result of the Hare-Clark PR system, will occupy 20 per cent of the seats in Tasmania's lower house. But in South Australia, where there has been an equally great expectation of a hung lower house, The Greens vote has been in the vicinity of 8 per cent, representing a 1.6 per cent increase on the 2006 result. Tammy Jennings is, however, about to join her Greens colleague Mark Parnell in the State's upper house.

Perhaps I am being too pessimistic. After all, The Greens' vote has consistently increased and the party is focusing on local government and beginning to reap the rewards of that strategy. In a parochial context, it is the presence of a substantial number of Greens on Leichhardt and Marrickville councils that provides The Greens with a platform and the opportunity to implement a number of Greens' policies. This may contribute to the potential success of Greens' candidates in the Balmain and Marrickville State electorates at the 2011 state elections. The Greens are also attracting an increasing number of first-time voters whose allegiance may well remain

with The Greens. That said, it remains unlikely that The Greens will be able to form government anywhere in Australia in their own right at any time within the foreseeable future. Certainly it is improbable that they will ever do so unless there is a radical reworking of Australia's electoral laws to reflect in a proportionate manner the real wishes of voters.

What options, in parliamentary terms, are open to The Greens? In Germany and Ireland, where proportional voting systems have facilitated strong Greens representation, The Greens have joined coalition governments. It is doubtful, however, that their doing so has delivered sustained joy to Greens' party members or supporters. As members of a Social Democrat –Greens coalition between 1998 and 2005, The Greens supported extensive cuts to employment conditions and the introduction of anti-welfare laws which they justified by the need to assure 'German companies the best chances on the markets of the future'. Moreover, despite widespread anti-war sentiment in Germany, the Greens under Joschka Fischer as foreign minister supported sending troops to Afghanistan. Even after leaving office, Fischer has continued to advocate their on-going deployment.²² The Greens have also supported last year's Israeli invasion of Gaza.²³ The upshot was that in the two years following the 2005 German federal elections, the Greens were not part of any government at the state or federal election, many voters deserting both them and their Social Democrat allies in favour of the newly founded Left Party. In April 2008, the Greens in Hamburg formed a coalition with the Christian Democrat Union, the first such coalition at the state level. As a price for admission to the coalition, the Greens had to consent to the deepening of the Elbe River, the construction of a new coal-fired power plant and two road

²² ²² <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2009/dec2009/pers-d10.shtml>

²³ <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2009/jan2009/berl-j12.shtml>

projects they had previously opposed. The concessions they received in return included an increase in the number of elementary school grades, restoration of trams as a form of public transport, and more pedestrian-friendly real estate development.²⁴

In Ireland, in April 2007, Green Party candidates were elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly for the first time and in May 2007 entered into coalition government with the conservative Fianna Fail party. Prior to this, the party had been outspoken supporters of the Shell to Sea movement, a campaign to reroute a motorway, indirectly reduce US military use of Shannon airport, and relocate a gas refinery.²⁵ The failure to force their coalition partners to implement these measures has not bolstered Greens credibility so far as the environment movement is concerned.

So, coalition government is not without its perils. What other options remain? Extending support to conservative parties seems destined not only to alienate postmaterialist Greens voters and but also Labor voters who vote Greens in upper house elections but decline to do so in lower house elections. Perhaps it's time for The Greens to bite the bullet, acknowledge the fact that the electorate and the party's candidates see themselves as the most left-wing political party of any significance in Australia, and campaign accordingly. If the zeal with which Labor luminaries such as Lindsay Tanner attack The Greens is any indication, the ALP Left certainly knows where the threat to its supporter base is coming from.

²⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alliance_'90/The_Greens

²⁵ <http://www.counterpunch.org/browne06142007.html>

So, should The Greens in situations where they hold the balance of power advance a set of demands and undertake not to withdraw their support for a minority government that agrees to and observes those demands? This is relevant in hung lower houses of parliament where neither of the major parties commands a majority, although it's always worth remembering that when the major parties are in agreement on broad issues or specific legislation, as is usually the case, the ability of a minor party to exercise the balance of power evaporates.

Five Tasmanian Greens MPs held the balance of power in Tasmania in May 1989.²⁶ They signed an accord with Labor Leader Michael Field, which outlined the policies the ALP and Greens agreed to implement, in particular specific environmental policies such as nominating areas for World heritage listing and suspending logging in national estate forests. In return The Greens undertook to support supply bills and abstain from supporting Opposition no confidence motions.²⁷ Observers have attributed the very prescriptive nature of the Accord to its demise 18 months later in October 1990. A similar interlude in minority government, this time with The Greens informally reaching an understanding with the Liberals survived from February 1996 until July 1998, but ended with the major parties combining to reduce the size of the Legislative Assembly from 35 to 25, in the expectation that the increased quota required for election would eliminate The Greens as a force in Tasmanian parliamentary politics. There were, however, some positive outcomes of the informal agreement including an apology to indigenous Tasmanians and homosexual law reform. It remains to be seen

²⁶ Much of the material in this section is derived from a paper prepared by Gareth Griffith of the NSW Parliamentary Library Research Service, 'Minority governments in Australia 1989-2009: Accords, Charters and Agreements', <http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Prod/parliament/publications.nsf/0/1D2A665590995F7BCA2576E300831A6B>

²⁷ Ibid pp11-13

how each of the major parties will approach the prospect of having to deal with The Greens in the aftermath of Saturday's election result.²⁸

In New South Wales,²⁹ the 1991 State election resulted in a hung parliament with four independent members of the lower House holding the balance of power: Tony Windsor, John Hatton, Clover Moore, and Peter Macdonald. Initially Tony Windsor, a former member of the Nationals, accepted the position of Speaker and agreed to vote with the Government on all major bills. The situation changed with Terry Metherell's defection from the coalition government. Ultimately the Coalition needed the support of Windsor plus two of the three non-aligned independents to avoid defeat on the floor of the house.

In this situation, the Greiner government entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Hatton, Moore and Macdonald whereby they agreed to vote with the government on appropriation and no confidence motions except where matters of corruption or gross maladministration were at issue. This agreement resulted in significant reforms in areas such as electoral funding and disclosure requirements, entrenching in the constitution the independence of the judiciary, fixed four-year terms, strengthened powers for the Ombudsman and Auditor-General, some changes to defamation law, and whistleblower protections. Not all of these reforms have been implemented as envisaged and some have been watered down, often because governments

²⁸ I should briefly address the question posed by the title of this address. I think it is unarguable that The Greens are firmly established as a component of the political landscape of this country and that they are, therefore, mainstream irritants that the major parties must somehow learn to live with.

²⁹ Griffith, 'Minority Governments in Australia 1989-2009', pp1316

have systematically reduced the level of funding for inconvenient bodies such as the Ombudsman's Office.

In New South Wales, there is the possibility that the 2011 State election could result in both a hung lower house of parliament, and in an upper house where the minority government, whether Liberal or Labor, lacks a majority and could be dependent on potentially five Greens members of the Legislative Council to ensure the passage of legislation. This may not, however, present an insurmountable problem to the major parties. As ever, most Government legislation passes the Council either unopposed or with the support of the Liberal Opposition. For the last six or eight months the Government has been unable to secure the unwavering support of the two Shooters Party members, and has been unable to count on the formerly reliable Fred Nile (Christian Democrats) or Gordon Moyes (Family First). It would seem that the disagreements between Nile and Moyes are so great that their overriding concern is to be on opposite sides of the chamber whenever a vote is taken.

Clearly the Government is not happy and has tried to shore up Shooter support by effectively nullifying a Land & Environment Court decision that would prevent the construction of a shooting complex near Mittagong. This has not been enough. The Shooters have held out for shooting to be permissible in National Parks, a step too far even for this Government. The source of the Shooters' obstinate refusal to cooperate may not be solely a result of a commitment to a particular policy, but be motivated by the need to show their voters that the Shooters are not mere puppets of the Government.

Despite the Government not controlling the upper house nor having the unconditional support of the cross benches, in the last week it has had no difficulty in getting agreement to legislation privatising Waste Services NSW. Indeed, when it comes to divisions, the most common result has been the four Greens MPs on one side and everyone else on the other.

That said, it is one thing not to have an Upper House majority in the twelve or so months before an election when the Government may be keen to avoid contentious issues that could cast it in an unfavourable light. It is, however, a very different thing for a government to have no control for the entire four years of its term. In this situation one might expect both of the majors to tempt The Greens with a variety of blandishments.

To my mind, should this eventuate, The Greens MLCs will confront two very difficult decisions: with which devil should they sup and what, if anything, should they attempt to extract in return. As you may well gather from my previous remarks, I think any arrangement with a Liberal-National government would be fraught with danger to the ongoing support for The Greens of a significant segment of its voters.

In terms of reaching an agreement on reform policies, I would certainly be putting near the top of my list the introduction of multi-member electorates where candidates were elected to parliament on the basis of proportional representation. Clearly there are many other issues: a complete overhaul of planning legislation to restore elected representatives to the decision-making process, genuine donation reform, adequate funding for oversight bodies

such as the Ombudsman's Office, reinstatement of the Inspector-General of Prisons, rejigging of Question Time, and so forth. But until such time as some form of proportional representation for lower house elections is enacted, the political legacy of neo-liberalism will be difficult to shake off.

ENDS