

NSW election: Greens strike vote-swapping deal with Labor

Mike Head
25 March 2015

The Greens, who have become the third party of Australia's political establishment over the past two decades, revealed last week that they sealed a preferential vote-swapping deal with the Labor Party for this Saturday's New South Wales state election. The Greens will give their second preference votes to Labor in many lower house seats, while Labor will allocate its preferences to the Greens in the upper house.

The pact is a clear signal of the Greens' hopes of returning Labor to office in the state, and of joining a coalition government, or at least forming a partnership, as they did for three years with the previous federal Labor government of Prime Minister Julia Gillard.

Both Labor and the Greens are cynically exploiting the widespread hostility to Liberal-National Party Premier Mike Baird's plans to privatise the state's electricity grid, and to the budget cuts of Prime Minister Tony Abbott's federal Liberal-National government, while whitewashing Labor's plans to impose the austerity demands of the financial and corporate elite.

The Greens' agreement with Labor epitomises their role in seeking to channel the rising economic and social discontent back into the straitjacket of the parliamentary system and the formation of yet another pro-business government. While feigning opposition, for purely electoral reasons, to unpopular aspects of the corporate agenda shared by Labor and Liberal-National governments, the Greens are intent on serving in, or propping up, such a government.

Currently holding one seat in the 93-member lower house, and five seats in the 42-person upper house, the Greens want to pick up enough extra seats, mainly in inner-Sydney, to allow Labor to form a minority government. Labor has only 23 seats in the lower house

after its landslide defeat at the last state election in 2011.

Greens upper house member John Kaye claimed that the situation was now different from the 2011 election, when the Greens rejected a vote-swapping deal with Labor. Four years ago, the Greens were trying to distance themselves from Labor's political stench, which was the result of 16 years in office implementing the dictates of big business—including the sell-off of the electricity retail network—and of the pro-property developer corruption that engulfed Labor.

Kaye told the media: "This is about saying if you're going to have a choice between Labor and the Coalition, then Labor is better. The Greens couldn't preference Labor in the last election. Not only had they just privatised the [electricity] generator outputs and the retailers but there was a terrible smell of corruption about the party. Things have changed in four years and Labor has decided they're against electricity privatisation."

Kaye added that the Greens also decided to side with Labor because of concerns about the Baird government's impact on Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and the privatisation of community care.

These are deeply fraudulent claims. While Labor is presently posturing as an opponent of electricity privatisation, the previous state Labor governments of Premier Bob Carr in the 1990s and Premiers Morris Iemma, Nathan Rees and Kristina Keneally from 2005 to 2011 attempted to sell off the entire network.

Any Greens-backed Labor government would again move to meet the requirements of the financial markets, including by matching the \$20 billion asset sale planned by the Liberal-National Coalition. State Labor leader Luke Foley has stated his readiness to privatise

other facilities, if not the electricity “poles and wires” targeted by Baird’s government.

As Kaye is well aware, the Baird government’s assault on the TAFE system—hiking fees astronomically and handing over funding to corporate profit-making colleges—flows directly from the “competitive tendering” system established nationally by the Gillard government. The same goes for the outsourcing of community services, which is spearheaded by the National Disability Insurance Scheme launched by Gillard’s government, which consists of handing over disabled people to private service operators.

Behind their phony claims to oppose “neoliberalism,” the Greens are just as committed to enforcing the requirements of big business as Labor and Liberal-National. In this election, they have sent big business a message to that effect by ensuring that their limited election promises are “fully costed” in order to match the two main parties in promising budget surpluses.

Instead of raising \$20 billion by leasing the electricity assets, the Greens propose to borrow the same amount on the global financial markets, to be repaid over 20 years at \$1.35 billion a year. They also suggest minor extra taxes on property sales, gambling and large business transactions to raise about \$600 million a year.

On this basis, the Greens advocate a \$20 billion “infrastructure investment” program over four years, claiming that this would generate 15,000 new jobs and “training opportunities” for the unemployed. Even if this target were to be reached, which is highly unlikely, it would be a drop in the bucket compared to the catastrophic levels of unemployment. More than 250,000 workers are currently jobless in NSW, even on the understated official figures, and that toll will rise as the impact of the post-2008 global economic breakdown intensifies, accompanied by low commodity prices and ongoing closures of mines and factories.

The Greens’ \$20 billion fund would be divided up between education, hospital, housing, transport, renewable energy, sport and recreation and other “social” infrastructure. Schools, TAFE and hospitals combined would get a total of \$4.5 billion, or just over \$1 billion a year. This is a fraction of the amounts urgently needed to upgrade and expand the state’s chronically run-down facilities and services, let alone offset the \$25 billion cut from NSW education and

health over 10 years by last year’s federal budget.

Both Labor and the Greens voted for these cuts in federal parliament, so as not to block the budget’s main appropriation bills and cause a political crisis that could have triggered a mass movement of working class opposition to the whole austerity program.

A Greens-Labor minority government in NSW would not be the first such formation to impose drastic austerity measures on the working class. Most recently, from 2010 to 2014, the Greens held cabinet posts in a Tasmanian state Labor government, presiding over deep cuts to schools and the public sector, while nationally the Greens collaborated with the Gillard government as it began to slash social spending and tighten Australia’s military ties with Washington.

In Germany, the Greens joined the Social Democrats in office between 1998 and 2005, and helped rehabilitate German militarism by agitating for German participation in the 1999 NATO bombardment of Yugoslavia. Since then, they have entered various state governments, including those led by openly right-wing parties committed to drastic cuts in public expenditure.

As the Socialist Equality Party explains in its election statement, the Greens are no “progressive” alternative. They are a bourgeois party, committed to maintaining the private profit system. By promoting illusions that capitalism can be reformed to produce socially just outcomes, the sole aim of the Greens is to keep workers and youth subordinated to parliament and the capitalist nation state, as they collaborate with their Labor and Liberal-National colleagues to impose unprecedented attacks on the working class.

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