

# Australian Greens offer to enter future coalition with Labor

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Within barely 48 hours of the official announcement of a double-dissolution federal election to be held on July 2, leading figures in the Greens had offered to form a coalition government with the opposition Labor Party and take ministries in a future Labor cabinet. The offer demonstrates, from the very outset of the election campaign, that the claim by the Greens to represent a “progressive” alternative to Labor’s right-wing program and policies is cynical and dishonest.

On Monday evening, Adam Bandt, the member for the seat of Melbourne and the Greens’ only representative in the lower house of parliament, declared on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s “Q&A” program that the Greens wanted to join forces with Labor. He asserted a Labor-Green coalition would deliver “a stable and effective and progressive parliament.” On Monday, Greens leader Richard Di Natale told a press conference that while a coalition with the Liberals was “inconceivable,” his party would enter a Labor government.

The Greens have rushed to announce their willingness to serve as Labor’s coalition partners under conditions where early polling suggests neither of the major parties—Labor or the governing Liberal-National Party Coalition headed by Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull—will win an outright majority in the lower house of parliament where governments are formed. After six years of unprecedented political turmoil, the Greens have stepped forward to offer themselves as the guarantor of “stability” in the event of a hung parliament.

In his statements on “Q&A,” Bandt invoked the support of the Greens for the minority Labor government of Julia Gillard from 2010 to 2013 as evidence of their reliability. Along with several independents, Bandt kept Labor in power and voted for its budgets and key policies. He declared that this was “one of the most productive periods” of Australian government.

The record of the Gillard’s government demonstrates, however, that it was one of the most right-wing in Australian history. It dramatically expanded Canberra’s involvement in US-led wars and military intrigues, accelerated policies that have devastated the public health and education systems, as well as disability services, and slashed social welfare eligibility for single parents and the young unemployed.

In 2011, the de-facto Labor-Green coalition aligned Australia unconditionally with the US “pivot to Asia,” which consists of a massive military-build up in the Asia-Pacific in preparation for confrontation and war with China. Former Greens leader, Bob Brown, along with Bandt, warmly welcomed US President Barack Obama after he announced the “pivot” from the floor of the Australian parliament. The Greens propped up Gillard as she signed a military deal with Obama that expanded US bases and operations within the country, including the establishment of a new US marine “rotation” in the northern city of Darwin. Labor, with the complicity of the Greens, also supported the US-led wars in the Middle-East and internationally. Under Gillard, the country’s troop deployments and combat operations in Afghanistan reached their high point.

At the same time, the Gillard government cut welfare payments to around 100,000 single parents, forcing them onto poverty-level unemployment benefits. According to Treasury data, from 2012–13, it carried out the largest cut to public spending since 1970–71, reducing expenditure by 3.2 percent in real terms. In its 2013 budget, the Greens-backed government introduced the largest single-cut—\$2.3 billion—to university funding in history. It deepened the bipartisan assault on fundamental democratic rights, reopening the concentration camp-style detention centres on Nauru and Manus Island in the Pacific, where refugees have been consigned since Gillard’s proposal to force asylum-seekers to Malaysia

was deemed unlawful by the High Court.

While the Greens claimed to oppose aspects of this agenda, they maintained their formal alliance with Labor until February 2013, and continued to guarantee the government budgetary supply and confidence until it was voted out of office. The Greens fully backed Labor policies such as the performance-based “Gonski” education funding model and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which are both aimed at privatising public services.

This is the type of regime that Di Natale and Bandt want to bring to power—this time, however, with Greens holding ministries.

To ensure that the ruling elite got the message that the Greens would be ready to impose an agenda of militarism and austerity, Bandt held up as a model the “Red-Green” Coalition between the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens in Germany from 1998 to 2005. In 1999, the SPD-Green coalition backed the NATO bombardment of Serbia and dismemberment of Yugoslavia and launched the first German intervention into a war since World War II. It also imposed the “Hartz” measures, which unleashed historic attacks on the German social-welfare state and the living standards of the German working class.

By invoking the German experience, Bandt and the Greens have sought to make clear that there is no line they will not cross in their bid to cement themselves as the new “mainstream” party that can be counted on to defend the interests of Australian capitalism.

Bandt mused in an essay, published in the Fairfax media on Tuesday: “What might future green/red power sharing look like, if Labor comes to the party?” Answering his own question, he wrote: “Everything should be on the table, from taking ministries to staying on the crossbench, from detailed policy changes to parliamentary reform, from guaranteeing supply sight unseen to wanting to help craft budgets.”

At this point, Labor has publicly rejected the Greens’ overtures. The Australian financial and corporate establishment is desperate for the election to result in a clear majority government, which can push through massive budget spending cuts and other austerity legislation that has up to now failed to pass through both houses of parliament. To this end, both Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Labor leader Bill Shorten yesterday signed a “solemn promise” not to form a coalition with the Greens in the event of a hung parliament. Their aim was to discourage voters from supporting the Greens at the ballot box. Shorten has gone

so far as to suggest the holding of another election if neither major party secures a majority.

To undermine the Greens, the Murdoch-owned *Daily Telegraph* and other publications are waging a campaign to demonise this pro-capitalist organisation as “loonies” and “extremists.” Yesterday, the *Telegraph* produced an extraordinary front-page appeal to voters in the seat of Grayndler, in Sydney’s inner-west, to re-elect senior Labor Party figure and former deputy prime minister Anthony Albanese. The Greens candidate in Grayndler, firefighters’ union official Jim Casey, is being absurdly portrayed by both Albanese and the Murdoch press as a “radical,” even “Trotskyist” opponent of capitalism because he once belonged to the now defunct pseudo-left International Socialist Organisation.

Away from the glare of the media spotlight, however, both Labor and the Liberal Party are already carrying out sordid backroom negotiations with the Greens over preference deals. Greens Queensland Senator Larissa Waters, responding to the declarations that no coalition would be ever formed with the Greens, drily noted: “That may be the case with what they’re saying today, but I am confident that in the event of a hung parliament you would see them banging down our door...”

Greens Tasmanian Senator Nick McKim pointed to the experience of the 2010 Tasmanian state elections, when Labor had also pledged not to ally with the Greens. McKim observed. “In fact, the Labor premier at the time was describing me as the devil and he would never do a deal with the devil.... about three weeks later I was sitting around the cabinet table with him.”

As education minister in the Labor-Green Coalition in Tasmania, McKim spearheaded an unprecedented assault on public education when he attempted to shut down 20 schools. While the state government backed down amid a public furore, McKim earned his credentials as a ruthless advocate of corporate interests and austerity cuts.

Di Natale, Bandt, Waters and the entire Greens organisation are seeking their own opportunity to do likewise.



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