

Australian election outcome heightens divisions within the Greens

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The result of the Australian federal election has exacerbated conflicts within the Greens, after the party did not secure any new seats in the lower house of parliament and faces the prospect of losing at least one of its current positions in the upper house or Senate.

The election was marked by unprecedented hostility to the political establishment with around 26 percent of the population voting in the Senate for parties and groupings other than the Liberal-National Coalition, Labor or the Greens. The Greens vote in the Senate dropped as compared to the 2013 election. While its national lower house vote increased marginally from 2013, the result was substantially below its 2010 election results.

Rival groupings within the Greens have responded by airing their differences via leaks to the media, with both sides presenting the result as a product of the failed tactics of their opponents.

On Monday, the *Australian Financial Review* published an article entitled “Recriminations begin after Greens fail to gain lower house seats.” It declared: “Greens insiders are venting their frustration on NSW [New South Wales] Greens, saying their campaign was outdated and failed to capitalise on the increasing number of inner city progressives.”

The article noted the anger of the party’s federal branch over the failure of the NSW Greens to make any gains in the inner-city electorates of Sydney and Grayndler, which the party was targeting. It stated that the federal office viewed the campaign of Greens candidate for Grayndler, Jim Casey, as being “too bolshy.”

Casey, a union bureaucrat and former member of the pseudo-left International Socialist Organisation, is a representative of a so-called “left” grouping within the Greens, centred in NSW, and led by Senator Lee Rhiannon. During the course of the campaign, he was rebaited by Labor incumbent, Anthony Albanese, and the Murdoch-owned *Daily Telegraph* as a “Greens

extremist” who, they absurdly claimed, was committed to the “overthrow of capitalism.”

Publicly, Rhiannon blamed the vote result in NSW on the “scare campaign” run by the Labor Party. However, views of this fake-left grouping were elaborated in a comment in the *Guardian* headlined, “Without some serious soul searching, the Greens will never move beyond the 10% plateau.” The author was Osman Faruqi, a former Greens staffer and the son of Mehreen Faruqi, a Greens NSW state MP who is closely identified with the Rhiannon wing of the party.

Faruqi wrote, “The problem the Greens face is that they have pursued a ‘steady as she goes’ approach over the past decade while the Australian public has been simultaneously losing its faith in politics and rejecting the whole concept of political stability and business as usual.” He added that the Greens had “spent the last few terms of parliament trying to *become* the political establishment while voters have spent every election since 2007 punishing whoever is in power.”

Faruqi quoted former Greens national co-convenor Christine Cunningham who bluntly stated: “In a world desperate for change and hope, we offered a centrist position summed up in a vague slogan... maybe as a party of really smart, but often too-privileged-to-quite-get-it members, we should take a long hard look at ourselves and make some radical changes.”

Like Faruqi, Cunningham was expressing concerns that the party’s orientation in the election had too obviously exposed the class character of the Greens, as a capitalist party whose principal constituency is among the most affluent sections of the middle-class.

Greens leader, Richard Di Natale spelled out his political orientation when he declared that swings towards the Greens in some of Melbourne’s wealthiest seats had “cemented the foundations for our party.” He revealingly stated that it was “only a matter of time before seats like

Higgins, Wentworth, Kooyong turn Green.”

According to the property website Domain, each of the seats is on the list of the electorates with the greatest home values. Wentworth, a Liberal-held seat in Sydney’s eastern suburbs has a median house price of \$2.5 million, the highest in the country, median values in Higgins are \$1.75 million and in Kooyong, \$2 million.

Faruqi concluded his article by declaring that “The party has the technical and political ability to position itself as a real political force, tapping into disenfranchised voter sentiment and shaping it, but it needs to re-evaluate and radically overhaul its current approach to pull it off.”

Faruqi and Cunningham are fearful that the developing political radicalization among workers and young people, which found initial expression in the mass repudiation of Labor and the Liberals, will bypass the Greens.

This fake-left grouping is well aware that the party’s decision to prop up the minority Labor government of Julia Gillard following the 2010 election in what was a de facto coalition, has damaged the claims of the Greens to represent a “progressive alternative” to Labor and the Liberals, in the eyes of millions of workers and youth.

The Labor government, with the unconditional support of the Greens, carried out sweeping cuts to education and healthcare, and removed 100,000 single parents from their welfare benefits, as part of a broader pro-business agenda. It expanded the persecution of refugees, and aligned Australia with the US military build-up in the Asia-Pacific and its preparations for war against China.

Rhiannon, and the grouping she represents, supported the Gillard government as much as the rest of their party. Rhiannon herself was a Senator, and did not once publicly question, let alone oppose, Greens’ support for the right-wing Labor government and its anti-working class policies. The sole concern of Rhiannon and her supporters is that their own pretensions to be “activists” committed to “social and economic justice,” the rights of Aborigines and refugees and the poor are being exposed.

They fear that the overtures of Di Natale and his colleagues to the financial elite, and their appeals to form a coalition government with the Labor Party, threaten the Greens with the fate of the Australian Democrats. That party capitalised on opposition to the political establishment in the 1990s, declaring that it would “keep the bastards honest.” Its support collapsed after 2001, when it joined with the Howard Coalition government to push through the Goods and Services Tax (GST), a regressive consumption tax directed against the working class.

The same centrifugal tendencies that have seen the emergence of conflicts within the Liberal-National Coalition and less obviously the Labor Party threaten to provoke a split within the Greens.

At the same time, the pseudo-left organisations, with which Rhiannon and her colleagues have close ties, are in a deep-going crisis of their own. A faction of Socialist Alliance recently resigned from the party, declaring their aspiration to pursue “left regroupment,” while the Socialist Party has virtually disintegrated, amid vitriolic rival claims of sexual abuse.

Rhiannon, a former Stalinist, is conscious of the need for new political traps to head-off a developing movement of the working class. Last year, she was a featured speaker at a Socialist Alliance meeting hailing the Syriza government in Greece, and calling for the establishment of a similar formation in Australia.

Syriza won widespread support by claiming to oppose the crippling austerity measures that produced an acute social crisis. Within weeks of forming government, Syriza betrayed its election promises, signing a deal with European authorities for a continuation of the assault on the working class. Since then, it has participated in the European-wide persecution of refugees, while continuing to decimate pensions, healthcare, education and other social rights of the working class.

The support of the fake-left of the Greens and parties such as Socialist Alliance for the Syriza government, is a warning of what they are preparing in Australia to prevent opposition among workers and youth from developing into a conscious challenge to capitalism based on a socialist and internationalist program.



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