

Australia: Tasmanian election results in unstable hung parliament

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Last Saturday's election in the Australian island state of Tasmania produced further evidence of a long-developing political crisis across the country. The results are a disaster for both the main post-World War II parties of rule: Labor and Liberal.

While the exact seat count may take several weeks to finalise, it is already clear that the outcome is a highly volatile hung parliament, with both Liberal and Labor falling far short of a majority of 18 in the 35-seat Legislative Assembly.

The collapse of support for both Labor and Liberal means that the Liberals are likely to have just 15 seats out of 35, with Labor on 10 or 11, the Greens 5, and the right-wing populist Jacqui Lambie Network (JLN) 2 or 3, plus two independents.

In a staggering rebuff, the Tasmanian Liberal government lost a quarter of its primary votes from the previous state election in 2021, plunging by 12 percentage points from about 48 percent to about 36 percent. Yet, despite this implosion, Labor gained only 1 percentage point, taking its primary vote to about 29 percent from a near-record low of 28 percent in 2021.

The Greens' vote rose marginally from about 12.5 percent in 2021 to 14 percent, while Senator Lambie's JLN, running for the first time, picked up around 7.5 percent. The rest of the 35 percent vote against Labor and Liberal went to a large assortment of various independents who tried to capitalise on the disaffection.

This trend is not confined to Tasmania, raising the spectre of similar parliamentary turmoil at the national level after the next federal election, which is due by May 2025. There were reports yesterday from within the Labor Party that Prime Minister Anthony Albanese is now considering calling the election before the end of this year in the hope of averting a loss.

Today's Newspoll in the *Australian* points to a parallel process to that displayed in Tasmania. It showed Labor's primary vote nationally falling to 32 percent, down from the near record low of 32.5 percent it received at the May 2022

federal election, with the Liberal-National Coalition remaining on 36 percent.

Giving voice to the concerns in the ruling capitalist class, the Murdoch media newspaper warned that federal Labor was "drifting toward minority government at the next election."

A state by-election in South Australia on Saturday also saw a precipitous decline in Labor and Liberal votes—they lost 10 percentage points between them. The state Labor government there may win the seat of Dunstan, an inner Adelaide electorate, thanks to second preferences from the Greens, whose vote rose to 22 percent from 13.7 percent in 2022.

In Tasmania, Liberal state Premier Jeremy Rockcliff is trying to cling to office by negotiating deals with the JLN and the independents, despite them having campaigned as opponents of his government. If no deals are possible, the Liberals would depend on these elements providing assurances of not denying financial supply to the government.

Even if the Liberals survive an initial vote of confidence in the assembly, they would need to rely on a potentially hostile parliament to pass every piece of legislation and for the government's ongoing existence.

Rockcliff, the leader of the last remaining non-Labor government at the federal, state or territory level, called the snap election a year early after two parliamentary defections effectively blew his government apart, reducing it to a minority. He appealed to voters to endorse his pleas for "stability," only to end up with an even worse outcome.

Significantly, the broadly-detested federal Liberal-National Coalition leader Peter Dutton stayed out of Tasmania throughout the election campaign for fear of triggering a greater collapse in the Liberal vote.

The result was more calamitous for Labor. That was despite its state leader, Rebecca White, seeking to distance herself at the last minute from the Albanese government's widely-opposed escalating commitment to the AUKUS war plans against China, which has been reinforced by its

backing for the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza.

A week before polling day, White said a state Labor government would not permit nuclear-powered AUKUS submarines to dock in Tasmanian ports. At the same time, however, she defended the Albanese government's alignment behind AUKUS.

On Saturday night, White left open the hope of forming a minority government with the support of the Greens, who were themselves anxious to form a coalition with Labor, but Labor's state administrative committee ruled out such a prospect on Sunday on the basis that trying to form government with only 10 seats in parliament would be unviable.

An editorial in the Murdoch media's *Australian* today backed the decision to overrule White, declaring that trying to form a "grand coalition" of Labor, the Greens, JLN and independents "would have been a blueprint for instability." It proclaimed that "avoiding such a potpourri" was in "the nation's best interests."

Having lost three state elections in a row since 2014, White is now set to be deposed as Labor leader, yet Rockcliff may not last either. He could face removal as well amid Liberal factional infighting over the destabilising outcome.

Tasmania, Australia's smallest state, has become an acute example of the deteriorating social conditions facing the working class nationally, which have only intensified over the past 22 months since the Albanese government barely scraped into office.

None of the parties or independents contesting the election, including the Greens, had any real solutions to the cost-of-living, housing and public health crisis that has produced shocking levels of homelessness, rental and mortgage stress, and public hospital patient deaths.

Labor's claims to address the social blight had no more credibility than they had in 2021. That was partly because of its own record in inflicting deep cuts to schools and public services while in office from 2010 to 2014 in partnership with the Greens, matching the similar role of the federal Greens-backed Labor governments under Julia Gillard and Kevin Rudd.

Labor's political disease goes far deeper. It reflects decades of enforcing the dictates of the corporate elite in collaboration with the trade union bureaucrats, especially since the Hawke and Keating federal Labor governments of 1983 to 1996 and their corporatist Accords with the unions that led to the widespread destruction of workers' jobs and conditions.

Tasmanian Greens leader Rosalie Woodruff yesterday indicated that her party would do its best to shore up the political establishment. She claimed that whoever formed

government would need to heed her party's policy positions. "The Greens will have a big say in the next parliament," she said.

While posturing as a progressive "third party," raising concerns about global warming and the social crisis, the Greens claim that these disasters can be resolved by the private profit system and they back the militarist offensive against China.

The Greens have a long record of propping up capitalist governments in Tasmania, as in Germany. They joined their first de facto coalition with a Tasmanian Labor government from 1989 to 1992, and later helped maintain a minority Liberal government from 1996 to 1998. Following the 2008 global financial crisis, the Labor-Greens government of 2010 to 2014 closed many schools and destroyed some 1,000 public sector jobs.

The protracted decomposition of the existing political order underscores the necessity to transform the deepening social, political and anti-war discontent into a conscious movement of the working class against the capitalist system itself and the building of the only party, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), that will lead that struggle.

As long as the hostility to the open parties of big business and war remains dissipated and diverted into the hands of so-called independents, Greens and other "third party" formations, the ruling class retains power. It will only turn ever-more in the direction of war, austerity and dictatorial forms of rule.

The SEP has launched a campaign throughout the working class to regain our official party registration, which was anti-democratically stripped from us in 2022. We must have the right to have the SEP's name on ballot papers alongside our election candidates to give voters the basic right to express their support for the only party fighting for the socialist alternative to capitalist barbarism, war, inequality and dictatorship.

We urge all our readers and supporters to join the SEP as electoral members using the form below, and to seriously consider applying to become full members of the party.



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