

Australia: Fall of Tasmanian state government underscores political instability

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A long-developing political crisis in Tasmania produced turmoil in the island state over the past week, following an 18-17 no-confidence vote in the lower house of parliament against the minority Liberal Party government.

For the second time in 16 months, the Liberal premier, Jeremy Rockliff, called for an early poll after a breakdown in relations with independents who had propped up his administration.

After the no-confidence vote Thursday, June 5th, the state was in political limbo. It took almost seven days for the state's governor, former federal judge Barbara Baker, who represents the monarchy, to grant Rockliff's request for a snap election.

Voters in the state are now headed for an election on July 19, the fourth in just seven years, with polls indicating that another hung parliament and minority government is the most likely result.

These developments are a further indication of the historic instability produced by the growing loss of support, not just in Tasmania but across Australia for the two main post-World War II parties of capitalist rule, Labor and Liberal.

Tasmania has the lowest population of any state—just about 575,000 residents—but it has become a concentrated expression of the deteriorating economic and social conditions for the working class nationally, and the resulting political disaffection.

The latest Tasmanian opinion poll, conducted in May by Enterprise Marketing and Research Services (EMRS), showed Labor on about 31 percent, Liberals 29 per cent, independents 27 percent, and the Greens 14 percent.

That indicates that the combined vote for the two parties that have governed the state for decades, Labor and Liberal, sometimes shored up by the Greens, could fall to a new low of 60 percent, with the discontent currently mainly expressed in support for various independents.

That would leave both Labor and Liberal well short of a majority under Tasmania's Hare-Clark proportional preferential voting system, which divides the state into five electorates, each returning seven candidates after the

distribution of preferences from unsuccessful candidates.

Governor Baker held talks with Labor Party state leader Dean Winter, who had moved the no-confidence motion with the support of the Greens and three independents. But Winter declared he would not try to form another minority government with the Greens, as Labor last did from 2010 to 2014.

In the House of Assembly, the Liberals had just 14 out of the 35 seats, while Labor held only 10, the Greens had five, with six independents.

The Liberals, who have ruled the state since the landslide defeat of the Labor-Greens government in 2014, had suffered a staggering 12 percent swing against them at the 2024 early election, down to about 36 percent. Despite that implosion, Labor had gained only 1 percentage point, taking its primary vote to about 29 percent from a near-record low of 28 percent in 2021.

Labor's low vote reflected the fact that for the past decade, both Labor and the Greens have remained discredited by their 2010–14 partnership, which imposed the burden of the 2008–09 global financial crisis by slashing public sector jobs and closing scores of schools.

Labor leader Winter may be seeking to capitalise on the victory of the Albanese Labor government in the May 3 federal election. But the May opinion poll result suggests an ongoing deterioration in support for both Labor and Liberal.

Labor won the federal election despite obtaining only about a third of the primary vote. That was because the Liberal vote fell further to around 25 percent (counting its share of the Liberal National Party vote in Queensland), largely due to its association in the minds of voters with the fascistic Trump agenda.

Winter's stated reasons for bringing the no-confidence vote were in line with the pro-business program of the Albanese government. The Labor leader cited the growth of net public debt, which is predicted to reach almost \$11 billion in 2028–29, when the deficit will hit \$236 million, as well as the bungled rollout of new Spirit of Tasmania ferries for services to the Australian mainland.

Last August a state government-commissioned report by economist Saul Eslake projected net debt would rise to \$16 billion by 2035, at which time the state would be paying \$750 million per year in interest payments.

Winter refused to say how the deficit would be slashed, but further cuts to social spending are certain, regardless of which parties form the next government. Eslake calculated that Tasmania already spends around \$880 less per head annually on services than the national average.

The Liberal government had vowed to sell public assets to return the budget to surplus, but last weekend, Premier Rockcliff performed a desperate about-face, issuing a statement ruling out privatisation.

Both Labor and Liberal remain committed to a football stadium at Macquarie Point in the capital Hobart, now slated to cost almost \$1 billion to build, amid a worsening housing and social crisis. The stadium is a condition of the Australian Football League (AFL) for a Tasmanian club to enter the league. But polls indicate close to 60 percent popular opposition to the project, leading the Greens and most independents to oppose it.

Economic and social conditions are worsening in the state, which heavily relies on tourism, farming and Goods and Services Tax revenues from the federal government. Officially unemployment is at 3.8 percent, but this is likely to rise as the global economy is hit by the Trump administration's trade war and militarist offensive.

Last month, Liberty Bell Bay, near the northern town of George Town, Australia's only manganese alloy smelter, and a major employer in the region, announced it would "enter a period of limited operations," immediately threatening the jobs of its 250 full-time workers. The management cited global ore supply issues, volatile prices and extensive US tariffs as reasons for the decision.

Wages and incomes are generally lower in Tasmania than the national averages, yet the cost of living is higher, especially in Hobart. The Tasmanian Council of Social Service estimates that 120,000 people—more than one in five—live below the poverty line.

Tasmania's overall child poverty rate is 24 percent, with some areas experiencing much higher rates, such as Ravenswood, a suburb of the northern city of Launceston, with a 59.4 percent rate. There are long waiting lists for social housing, with 5,094 people on the priority waitlist as of April 2025. Rents have soared in recent years, exacerbating housing stress.

Public hospital deaths, including at least 29 previously unreported at Launceston General Hospital between 2016 and 2022, have highlighted the underfunding of public health.

After the no-confidence vote the Greens pleaded

unsuccessfully for a deal with Labor, offering to shore up a Labor government as they did from 2010 to 2014, mirroring the federal Greens de facto partnership with the Gillard Labor government in the same period. Even after being rebuffed by Labor, Greens leader Rosalie Woodruff held out the illusion that after the July 19 election, "with a new government and the Greens in the balance of power, we can make real change happen."

The Greens have promised to oppose the AFL stadium, yet they have a long record of trying to buttress 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.

The political instability has been underscored by the infighting and breakup of right-wing federal Senator Jackie Lambie's self-named populist network, which secured three seats at the 2024 election, and then backed the formation of the minority Liberal government. The far-right Pauline Hanson's One Nation also has decided not to run candidates after failing to get registered as a state party.

This indicates no strong support for right-wing formations. But none of the parties or independents contesting the election, including the Greens, have any solutions to the cost-of-living, housing and public health crisis.

Labor also has been discredited by the Albanese government's \$368 billion commitment to the AUKUS war plans against China, and its backing for the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza. Its previous working-class base has disintegrated after 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.

The deepening decomposition of the existing political order underscores the necessity to transform the social, political and anti-war discontent into a conscious movement of the working class against the capitalist system itself.



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