Whitlam’s Children?
Labor and the Greens in Australia (2007-2013)
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The work presented in this dissertation is original, to the best of my knowledge and belief, except as acknowledged in the text. The material has not been submitted, in whole or in part, for a degree at The Australian National University or any other university.

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ABSTRACT

Over the past three decades, the gradual rise of the Australian Greens has transformed Australian politics. Where the Australian Labor Party once enjoyed parliamentary dominance over the progressive left, it now shares space with the minor party. At both the state and federal level, Labor has depended on Greens support to form government, and even more frequently to pass contentious legislation. After the 2010 federal election and its resulting minority parliament, the first in almost seventy years, the two parties signed a formal ‘Agreement’, with the Greens guaranteeing Labor confidence in return for policy demands and a great role in government. In the following three years, the Labor and Greens relationship received unprecedented public scrutiny. The Agreement and surrounding theatre became a major theme of the government – one amplified by Labor’s opponents.

Focusing on this first federal minority experience, the thesis examines the Labor and Greens relationship in Australia. Across forty-one interviews with federal representatives, it sought each party’s institutional perspective on a range of issues. Was the formal Agreement an effective model for minority government, and did it serve either party’s interests? What were the defining institutional and ideological differences between Labor and the Greens? In the longer term, was a closer arrangement possible, and did either party desire it? On top of these questions, the thesis examined a number of difficult policy areas facing the minority arrangement – carbon pricing, refugee processing and mining taxation. While the research revealed a number of different perspectives, even within parties, it uncovered a productive, though often hostile parliamentary relationship; united by a series of shared values, but divided by different approaches to parliament, politics and pragmatism.
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INTRODUCTION

Whitlam’s children?

On the 20th of October, 2014, Gough Whitlam, the former Labor Prime Minister, died at the age of 98. For Australians of a certain age and political persuasion, his death represented the end of an era. The occasion triggered an intense period of public remembrance, four decades after his ‘It’s Time’ campaign ended 23 years of conservative rule. Friends fondly recalled anecdotes and witticisms (how would Gough respond to meeting his maker in the afterlife? “You can be sure of one thing, I shall treat Him as an equal!”).\(^1\) Admirers compared Whitlam’s three vibrant and volatile years as Prime Minister to modern politics, with many considering the contrast unflattering to contemporaries.\(^2\)

Modern Labor politicians took this comparison seriously, using the moment to reflect on their tradition and the purpose of their politics. If “like no other Prime Minister before or since, Gough Whitlam redefined our country”, as its leader Bill Shorten argued, his life possessed lessons for the current party.\(^3\) Tanya Plibersek, Labor’s deputy leader, invoked Whitlam’s ability to “inspire” an electorate.\(^4\) So too did Wayne Swan, the party’s former Treasurer.\(^5\) Chris Bowen, its current shadow Treasurer, pointed to more mundane and practical achievements, like extending sewerage to Sydney’s suburbs.\(^6\) At the end of a full day of these condolences and reflections - legislative business had been temporarily suspended - Labor MPs gathered at the steps of Parliament House

\(^5\) Ibid, pp. 11546-11547.
\(^6\) Ibid, pp. 11527-11528.
to collectively honour their former leader. As a caucus, the party walked the road to Old Parliament House, where they laid flowers in commemoration. Just metres from the flowers was the spot where, 39 years earlier, Gough Whitlam famously responded to his government’s dismissal - “well may we say ‘God Save the Queen’, because nothing will save the Governor General”

While Shorten portrayed Whitlam as a figure distinctly within his own political tradition (“Gough Whitlam loved the Labor Party and the Labor Party loved Gough Whitlam”) other politicians also mourned his loss. Christine Milne, the head of the Australian Greens, paid condolence on behalf of her party, describing him as a “larger than life figure whose leadership profoundly changed the nation for the better”. The only Green in the House of Representatives, Adam Bandt, went further, identifying personally with Gough’s politics. Bandt told parliament that he “still believed in many of Gough Whitlam’s values, and I believe that they should be at the heart of our political system”. But while these memorials largely avoided partisan labels, other Greens laid explicit claim to Whitlam’s legacy. On the party’s website, Hall Greenland, the Convenor of the NSW branch and a former parliamentary candidate, argued that “as the Greens, we are proud to be the party that takes up where Gough Whitlam left off”. He went on to describe his party as “Gough’s children”. More controversially, Senator Lee Rhiannon posted an image to her Facebook page, comparing the Greens position on tertiary education to Whitlam’s decision to abolish university fees. Underneath a picture of Gough, Rhiannon placed the Greens logo, promising that “Gough Whitlam’s legacy for a progressive Australia will be remembered”.

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The image enraged Labor MPs. Anthony Albanese, the Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, called a press conference to denounce it. Before taking questions, Albanese - who beat Greenland in the seat of Grayndler a year earlier - described the image as “cheap, opportunistic and offensive, given that Gough Whitlam was a Labor man his entire life”. Later that day, Bill Shorten phoned Christine Milne and asked her to take it down. “How dare the Greens pretend to be what they are not … when Gough was making these changes, the Greens didn’t exist”. Not for the first time in recent political history, Australia’s Labor and Greens parties were disagreeing loudly and publicly. Despite sharing an admiration for the man and his legislative achievements, Whitlam’s death was driving the two parties further apart. At this point, it seemed like nothing would stop their fighting - not even a funeral.

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This thesis examines the relationship between Australia’s Labor and Greens parties. It is interested in what happens when an established, social democratic party meets a rising environmental one. Since 1993, when Western Australia elected the country’s first federal Greens Senator, this partisan dynamic has grown increasingly central to the practice of Australian politics, especially in shaping its progressive wing. Where the Australian Labor Party (ALP) once enjoyed relative dominance over the country’s political left, it now shares space with the Greens. Labor now often depends on Greens support to form government, and even more frequently to pass contentious legislation. Over a period of time, the relationship also helped revolutionise what Australians mean when they think of the word ‘progressive’, and the role of different political parties in representing those values.

The growth of green politics and the questions it raises for other political forces is not confined to Australia. Greens parties exist across the world, particularly in

13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
advanced democracies. But while the phenomenon is not restricted to Australia, the ‘political family’ was in a sense born here. In 1972, the same year Whitlam won office, the world’s first ‘green’ party formed in Tasmania. Called the United Tasmania Group, it emerged out of the ultimately unsuccessful campaign to save Lake Pedder, which the state Labor government planned on flooding and damming. While the Group did not attract enough electoral support to secure parliamentary seats, some of its members, most notably Bob Brown, went on to form the Tasmanian and national Greens.

After this decision, ratified by a show of hands at Hobart Town Hall, established democracies witnessed a surge in the popularity of green parties. With affiliates in 90 countries, the Global Greens, a loose network of national organisations, claims to be the “world’s fastest growing political family”. Though concentrated mostly in Europe, Greens parties won parliamentary seats in South America, Africa and the South Pacific. Where they were particularly successful, these parties helped form coalition governments, even earning cabinet positions. Since the Finnish Green League joined the country’s ‘rainbow coalition’ in 1995, Greens parties did the same in Germany, Italy, France, Denmark and Ireland. At the time of writing, Greens parties occupy important positions in a number of countries. In Sweden, the Social Democrats and Greens govern in coalition, with the minor party holding several ministries; in New Zealand, the Labour and Green parties share a “memorandum of understanding”, preparing for a cooperative campaign against the reigning National Party; in Germany, current polling suggests that the Social Democrats will be in a position to govern after this year’s election, but only with Green and broader left support.

A comparative study of these parties, published in 2006, concluded that “one does not need to be a committed supporter of a Green party to recognise [they] have become a more or less permanent feature on the European political scene”.

A decade on, with the parties growing beyond their European base, this observation remains valid, even a little narrow. Though individual parties might experience highs and lows (the Czech party went from being a junior coalition partner in 2006 to losing all its seats in 2010 - the Irish party experienced a similar electoral wipe-out in 2011) the overall Green presence in mature democracies is well established. While there were debates in the 1990s over the durability of Green politics - did these parties have a coherent supporter base? If they did, would they remain solid? - more recent studies suggest that “Green parties have become an integral part of contemporary party politics”, underpinned by a “specific social and attitudinal basis”.

In other words, Green parties now enjoy solid, if comparatively small supporter networks, which share a series of ideas about society, economics and politics.

This thesis is interested in whether this relatively new political force will cooperate with older, social democratic parties. This is especially relevant in instances where, as is often the case, the latter requires the former's support to govern. If green parties are “integral” to politics in many developed democracies, it is important to understand both their approach to government and their interaction with other parties around them. While both green and social democratic parties are nominally of the political left, at least in the popular

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imagination, questions still remain as to whether they can effectively collaborate, or if they even wish to effectively collaborate.

Underpinning this is a series of questions about their respective approaches to politics. Do the two parties share assumptions about social organisation and the ideal role of government within it? If so, what are these assumptions? Are there fundamental clashes of interest between a party that grew out of trade unionism and a party that grew out of environmentalism? Can a party aiming to challenge a political system effectively align with a party historically dedicated to managing it? Does a major party have different electoral imperatives to a smaller, more geographically defined one, and does this impact their policy decisions? Are the two parties fighting over the same electoral space, which is realistically a zero-sum game?

The thesis examines these questions as they apply to modern Australian politics. While the Greens grew consistently, albeit gradually through the late 1990s and early 2000s, the thesis focuses on the federal relationship during the most recent Labor government, from 2007 to 2013. While these six years were memorable for a number of reasons - they featured the country’s first female Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, uniquely bookended by separate stints of Kevin Rudd leadership - they were also unprecedented because of the new Greens position of influence. After the 2010 election, when neither major party gained a parliamentary majority for the first time since World War II, the Greens signed a formal ‘Agreement’ with Labor, exchanging confidence for policy demands and a greater role in government.23 For the first time in federal history, the Greens supported a minority government in the House of Representatives, while also occupying the Senate’s balance-of-power during a Labor administration. The agreement and surrounding political theatre became a key theme of the government, one amplified by Labor’s opponents.

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Across the six years, and certainly during the minority government, the Labor and Greens relationship received unprecedented public scrutiny. The Agreement represented a new federal experiment in cooperation, and commentators judged it accordingly. Speeches were given, opinion pieces written, a popular book published. Some thought that the Labor should “turn on the Greens and destroy them”, while others claimed the Greens was itself poisoned by the major party association. Another group returned that, if the left hoped to govern smoothly, Labor needed to learn that the Greens was its “real enemy”, and avoid the kind of distracting acrimony that characterised much of their interaction. While at times insightful, these contributions rarely examined the topic systematically, nor did they explore the underlying dynamics structuring relations. They tended to be either normative, assertive or explicitly partisan. They rarely attempted, at least in any concerted way, to investigate the institutional perspectives of either interested party.

This research acknowledges these public debates, but seeks more systematic answers to some of their questions. In forty one interviews with party representatives, it directly asked Labor and Greens figures about the relationship. The interviews questioned representatives about their time in minority government, difficult policy areas, as well as the relationship’s prospects for the future. Subjects ranged from party leaders, to former ministers, to newly elected members of parliament; from Christine Milne, to Tanya

Plibersek, to Richard Di Natale. The majority of these were with current or recently retired federal politicians, either directly involved in the Rudd and Gillard governments, or central to each party’s attempt to learn from the period. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing both uniform questions of participants - did the formal Agreement offer a useful model for minority government; how plausible is a future left coalition? - as well as inquiries about specific roles representatives held, particularly Ministers overseeing contentious portfolios. The interviews guided the research and represent its most significant empirical contribution to the topic.

While conducted two or three years after the end of minority government, questions around the Labor and Greens relationship remained live during the interviewing period. The first interview was rescheduled because the subject, Chris Bowen, called a press conference to denounce a Greens position on tax legislation.27 Another series was held during a parliamentary sitting week in March 2016, when the two parties clashed over changes to Senate voting - a debate ending with a Labor politician describing the Greens as “cancer”.28 While these frustrations seeped into some interviews, particularly during the Senate debate, the discussions retained a focus on structural and longer term considerations. These included the connection between labour and environmentalism, the nature of coalition politics in a traditionally two party system, the role of class and social forces in shaping the partisan cleavage, the potential tension between material and post-material politics, and different concepts of change and reform within the parliamentary process.

The thesis organises this material around four sections: (i) chapters one and two, which outline the Australian and global literature on political parties, progressive politics and the ‘old’ and ‘new’ lefts; (ii) chapters three and four, which investigate Labor and Greens perspectives on central questions, including the


defining differences between the parties and lessons from minority government; (iii) chapters five, six and seven, which explore some of the most stubborn policy dilemmas confronting the Agreement, including climate legislation, refugee settlement and mining taxation; and (iv) chapter eight, focusing on the relationship’s future, asking each party about the possibility of a left alliance developing in Australia.

Section one is divided into two chapters. Chapter one examines the history of party politics in Australia, from Federation to the rise of the Greens, with a focus on moments of change. While ostensibly a stable two party system, the chapter highlights temporary and lasting challenges to Australia’s traditional partisan cleavage, and the way Labor has responded to them. It makes a few points: that the party system possesses a greater fluidity than is sometimes acknowledged; that Labor has generally exhibited hostility towards insurgent groups; and that a divided political left has performed poorly in elections. Chapter two examines the global comparative literature on progressive parties, situating the Australian experience within broader trends in advanced democracies. Across the literature, it identifies three potential explanations for Labor and Greens relations: beginning with the work of Inglehart, the difference between a ‘material’ and ‘post material’ party, between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ lefts; beginning with the work of Kirchheimer, the difference between ‘catch all’ and ‘movement’ parties, between major and minor organisations; and the potential clash between the interests of organised labour and conservation, between ‘jobs and the environment’.

Section two is also divided into two chapters. These focus on the interview material, exploring the views of Labor and Greens politicians on key themes. Chapter three revolves around a question asked of each representative: why did you join Labor instead of an alternative like the Greens, or vice versa? Exploring individual reasons behind partisan identity, and the differences between the parties each deemed significant, the chapter provides an initial insight into how the two view each other. While not unanimous, the most common Labor response involved the practical benefits of major party politics, with its democratic legitimacy and access to executive government; Greens figures most
frequently cited environmental policy, and a view that Labor was an unreliable partner on conservation questions. Chapter four asks both parties about the experience and lessons of minority government. Did the formal Agreement represent an effective model of multi party politics, and did the closer relationship serve either party’s interests? Labor MPs were split between those who considered it a productive and progressive government, strengthened by its negotiating ability, and those who judged the deal a mistake, which ultimately contributed to its 2013 defeat. The Greens, on the other hand, were far more positive about the experiment, considering it proof of the multi-party system’s creative potential, and the need to transition away from the bipartisan model.

Section three is divided into three chapters. Each examines a policy area over which, during the Labor government, the two parties struggled to cooperate. The three issues represented a dilemma for the relationship, traces of which remain in contemporary debates. Chapter five studies Labor’s attempt to address climate change under both Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard, first unsuccessfully with its Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, then successfully with its Clean Energy Act. Chapter six examines refugee policy, beginning with Labor’s changes to the ‘Pacific solution’ it inherited in 2008, to Kevin Rudd’s deal with Papua New Guinea in 2013. Chapter seven analyses Labor’s attempt to reform resources taxation, involving its original announcement of a ‘Resource Super Profits Tax’, and the eventual implementation of the ‘Minerals Resource Rents Tax’. Each of these issues featured a complex history, with moments of Labor and Greens agreement and moments of intense dispute. They all, however, revealed important differences between the parties, whether based on ideology, interests or institutional assumptions.

This research began with a broad, speculative thought: were we witnessing the creation of a left bloc in Australian politics, to mirror the established Coalition on its right? The research is interested, even invested in the future of Labor and Greens relations in Australia. With increased political fragmentation - which is even complicating the remarkably stable Coalition - their interaction will continue to shape the parliamentary left’s prospects and evolving identity. It was in this context that representatives from both parties were interviewed, in an
attempt to understand their positions more clearly. While some individuals had previously expressed their views, often in the heat of public disagreement, it wanted to give politicians space to articulate their ideas - and perhaps even understand the other party’s perspectives. Modestly, it thought that asking these questions, then collecting and analysing their answers, represented a first step towards a more robust, self-aware relationship.
CHAPTER ONE
The two party system and its discontents, 1901-2007

Most studies of Australian politics categorise it as a stable, two party system. Though one beared a slightly different name, “the parties that competed for electoral support at the end of the twentieth century were very much the descendants of the parties that competed at the beginning of the century”. Other parties might exist, even exert influence, but only two possess a credible prospect of claiming executive government. After the ‘fusion’ of liberal and conservative groups in 1909, scholars characterised this dynamic in different ways, using different terms, but most implicitly accepted the bipartisan framework. Early research into Australian parties identified a clash between “Labor” and “non Labor” groups, or between “parties of initiative” and “parties of resistance”. While influential, these particular images of class conflict faced conservative critics, who felt consigned to mere reaction. Other work stretched the two party concept further, suggesting Australia embodied a “two and half party system”; featuring a number of active groups, but only two with genuine access to government. Even arguments normatively challenging two party politics often accepted that, for many “casual observers”, it was the familiar Australian reality.

But while this framework emphasised the static tendencies within Australian politics, other accounts showed a greater interest in its more fluid elements. Without rejecting the concept outright, a second thread noted that actual Australian history was more fitful, less linear than the simple two party image recognised. One of the earliest studies of local parties acknowledged that, “although the Australian electorate has never been divided into the multiplicity

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2 Hancock, WK, (1930), Australia, Jacaranda Press, Melbourne, chapters ten and eleven.
4 Ware, Alan, (1996), Political parties and party systems, Oxford University Press, New York, chapter five.
of parties which is characteristic of republican France ... it has seldom enjoyed a strictly two party system”.  

“A later history described it as an “unstable”:

“Governments change frequently enough ... however, the change of fortune has so often been accompanied by party disunity, by organisational chaos and the shifting of personal loyalties that it cannot be described as an allegiance between two broad alternatives”. 

In the fifty years following fusion, major parties fractured and realigned, the system rarely surviving a major crisis without reorganisation. Labor, the constant presence in federal politics, itself split on three separate occasions, the same numbers of times the non Labor grouping changed its name.

While the bipartisan model survived these rifts, repurposing itself to fit new political and social demands, cracks in the two party system became increasingly visible in the second fifty years of federal history. Though major parties still dominated executive office, their electoral position became less certain. Mirroring international trends, major party support steadily fell, as did consistent lifetime voting patterns. By 2010 major parties won 75% of the national vote, down from 90% in 1975. These changes created greater opportunities for smaller parties. Some, like the Democrats, gained a durable position of influence in the Senate, only for its support to evaporate after controversial decisions. Others, like One Nation, shot to prominence on a radical platform, to then collapse just as quickly - and then remerge over a decade later. More recently, ‘micro parties’ gained federal representation, grouped around charismatic leaders, parliamentary defectors and ambitious independents. The most popular

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8 Ibid, chapter one.
9 Cameron, Sarah and McAllister, Ian, (2016), *Trends in Australian Political Opinion: Results from the Australian Election Study 1987-2016*, The Australian National University, Canberra.
of these minor parties was the Greens, the third largest party in Australia since
the mid 2000s.

This chapter examines the history of party politics in Australia, with a focus on
the political left. Beginning with Federation in 1901 and ending with Kevin Rudd
and Labor’s election in 2007, it analyses moments of volatility in the system,
when dominant formations splintered and formed anew. Some of these were
public Labor ‘splits’, others were less obvious, more gradual shifts. Across this
history, the chapter makes a number of points about Australian party politics,
some with clear implications for Labor and the Greens: that party fragmentation
takes many forms, originating inside or outside parliamentary parties, following
external shocks or gradual social change, challenging or reinforcing the
dominant economic cleavage; that Labor has exhibited noticeable resistance to
coalition politics at various points in its history; and that the nature of these splits
has affected Labor’s electoral performance, often disastrously, with hostile
relations corresponding with long periods in opposition for the party.

Governing with ‘Three Elevens’ (1901-1909)

Australia’s first federal decade of party politics was in many ways its most
volatile. Until the election of Andrew Fisher’s Labor government in 1910, at no
ballot did a single party win a parliamentary majority. As Alfred Deakin famously
described it, this was the era of “three elevens” - Deakin’s Protectionist Party,
George Reid’s Free Trade Party, and the Labor Party - where Prime Ministerial
authority relied on fragile and shifting parliamentary coalitions.\footnote{La Nauze, JA, (1965), \textit{Alfred Deakin: a biography}, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, chapter 16.} Parties granted
leaders temporary confidence, only to then revoke it, often multiple times a term.
In the nine years between federation and the fusion of the two non Labor
parties, the Commonwealth held three elections, while parliament chose six
Amid this flux, questions of alliance and coalition were understandably central to Labor politics. Should it work with sympathetic parties, particularly the Protectionists, in order to implement parts of its platform? Or should it seek to govern alone, even if this meant directly confronting potential allies during elections? These were not easy questions, particularly as the line between colonial ‘labourism’ and ‘liberalism’ was fluid. While Protectionists opposed Labor’s ‘pledge’, many of its politicians, like HB Higgins and Charles Kingston, supported an active and progressive federal government - one that “removed the kind of material insecurity and deprived living conditions that prevent individuals from realising their potential as active, engaged citizens”.15 Alliances could potentially achieve Labor objectives, though perhaps at the expense of the party’s own electoral growth.

For much of the first decade, Labor’s answer to this dilemma was, as state representative George Black put it, “support in return for concessions”.16 This suited its inaugural leader, Chris Watson, who by temperament and experience gravitated towards negotiation, and who also enjoyed a close relationship with Alfred Deakin.17 After the nation’s inaugural election in 1901, Labor MPs backed Edmund Barton’s Protectionist government, assuring it confidence, and also voting for its major legislative achievements. While the political system was still in an embryonic state, with party lines appearing “confused and uncertain” even to MPs, the first parliament established key national institutions, as well as the foundations of ‘White Australia’ - a policy strongly supported by Labor at the time.18 Though mostly concerned with procedural matters, the experience did imply that Labor could forward its agenda without itself being in government.

While Barton lasted the full three year term, the Commonwealth’s second parliament was one of the most turbulent in the nation’s political history. In

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17 Ibid, p.46.
18 Loveday, Peter and Martin, Allan, (1977), The emergence of the Australian party system, Hale and Ironmonger Press, Sydney, p.399.
three years, Australia was led by four Prime Ministers. The first, Alfred Deakin, lasted less than six months. After Labor sought to amend, and then eventually vote against the new Protectionist leader’s Conciliation and Arbitration Act, Deakin resigned as Prime Minister. In the ensuing parliamentary vacuum, Deakin gave Labor its first opportunity with a second model: governing itself, with the support of Protectionist MPs. This made Watson Australia’s first Labor Prime Minister, and the first leader of a national labour government anywhere in the world. With unprecedented formal influence, but without a parliamentary majority, Labor was aware of its precarious position. Watson presented a cautious program, “less about Labor’s priorities as set out in the fighting platform, than an appeal to many of the Protectionists to keep them and the Free Traders from combining against the ministry”.

Even with this awareness, minority government was no easier for Watson than it was for Deakin. Many within Labor resisted the sacrifices demanded by coalition politics, an opposition mirrored by much of the Protectionist party. Deakin’s MPs were already split over whether to support Watson or Reid, with its more conservative representatives sharing the Free Trade contempt for Labor’s agenda. Aware of this vulnerability, Watson approached Deakin about creating a formal governing alliance between the two parties; a search for a working coalition that would “absorb much of Labor’s energy for the next few years”. While seemingly necessary for stable government, both Labor and the Protectionists carried serious reservations about such an arrangement. For one, the electoral dynamic between the parties was tense. Labor’s growing popularity threatened the seats of ‘radical’ Protectionists like Kingston, and these MPs wanted immunity from a partisan challenge. The problem with such a deal was that, for Labor critics, these were the precise concessions holding the party back. Prominent in Victoria’s Protectionist stronghold, these critical voices restricted Watson’s offer of alliance. Conscious of the growing split in his party, Deakin turned it down. Without an agreement and with conservative Protectionist opinion becoming more vocal, the world’s first national Labor government

20 Ibid, p.103.
collapsed in August 1904.\textsuperscript{21} The experiment was short lived, lasting only four months, and achieved little of substance.

For Watson, the chief lesson from the experience was that, at least for the time being, “Labor’s better course … was to avoid office and encourage a [Protectionist] government to enact progressive legislation”.\textsuperscript{22} The broader party, however, increasingly opposed closer relations with the Protectionists. In the minds of a substantial percentage of its rank and file membership, it was time for the party to disentangle its identity from Deakin’s MPs. According to Edward Findlay, a Senator from Victoria, immunity only prolonged a dying party:

“We have been fighting against the ‘good-as-Labor’ men, and any alliance formed invariably gives that tattered brigade of shreds and patches a new lease of life, which is spent on insidiously trying to undermine Labor organisation … Should we then compromise with those people whose very inactivity and insincerity led to the birth of the Labor Party?”\textsuperscript{23}

For the moment, however, Watson’s view held sway. From 1905 to 1908, Labor again supported a Protectionist government, even when, after the 1906 election, Labor possessed a larger parliamentary cohort than their partners. This arrangement oversaw a prolific and consequential period of legislative development. Linking tariffs and wages policy, the government created much of Australia’s ‘new protection’ framework, the foundation of the country’s burgeoning political economy. Paul Kelly later described it as the “Australian settlement”, Ian Marsh as the country’s “liberal-egalitarian” regime.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{21} McMullin, Ross, (2004), \textit{So monstrous a travesty: Chris Watson’s and the world’s first national labour government}, Scribe, Melbourne, chapter 8.
While aspects of this new protection later faced constitutional challenges, the government represented the high watermark of Labor-Protectionist relations - and also its final expression. Even as Deakin governed, the foundation of Australia’s three party system was eroding. With Labor increasing its vote, largely at the expense of Protectionists, opinion within the party became restless. Why should a stronger organisation, with more seats and more supporters, play understudy to Deakin? And in light of the judicial rulings, why weren’t the Protectionists defending the achievements of new protection more aggressively? Andrew Fisher, the party’s new leader in 1907, was receptive to these arguments, certainly more so than Watson. The non Labor side of politics was also moving. With the decline of the “fiscal question” - the debate over protective tariffs, the source of the original Protectionist and Free Trade division - ideological differences between MPs lessened. Realising the free trade cause was ebbing, Reid rebranded his organisation the Anti-Socialist Party, arguing that Labor’s economic policy was now the most pressing threat to Australia’s prosperity.

Debates continue over the demise of Australia’s ‘three elevens’. As Prime Minister, Deakin worked with Labor more often than the Free Traders, yet with a falling vote his party faced a dilemma: the leaders of the Anti-Socialists wanted an alliance with the Protectionists, but most within Labor did not. Some historians present Deakin’s decision to ‘fuse’ with the Anti-Socialists as the inevitable consequence of class politics, with middle class groups siding against working class groups. Others argue that Deakin and other liberals could not reconcile their Protestant belief in independence with Labor’s ‘pledge’, while some were driven by outright sectarian prejudice. Whatever the cause, in May 1909, the Protectionist and Anti-Socialist parties officially joined their forces.

Launched at Melbourne Town Hall, they called themselves the ‘Commonwealth Liberal Party’.

The amalgamation of the Protectionists and Anti-Socialists marked the end of Australia’s first era of party politics. For some, “the surprising thing about the fusion was that it took so long to arrive”.30 Unstable, capricious, though at times fruitful, the three party system required cooperative, coalition politics to function. Labor accepted this during certain years, particularly with the Protectionists under Deakin, but the party quickly grew weary of the compromises it demanded. At the 1910 election, the inaugural contest between Labor and the Liberals, Fisher’s party won an outright majority, the first of its kind in Australia. As Ross McMullin records in the party’s official history, “Labor’s period of flirtation with other parties was over … though some Labor activists wished their party had ended the relationship and forged ahead alone much earlier”.31

Hughes and World War I (1909-1916)

Australia’s first era of party politics was defined by its three poles, a dynamic most at the time considered unsustainable. Fusion was designed to solve this problem, with a two party system making government more predictable, structured and decipherable to voters. This idea, held by diverse political figures, was largely vindicated over the next seven years. With national debate revolving around a single cleavage, the major parties excelled. At the 1914 election, the Labor and Liberal parties received a combined 98% of the national vote. This bipartisan era was also a productive one for Labor. The party won two of its three elections, and governed for five of its seven years.

30 Loveday, Peter and Martin, Allan, (1977), The emergence of the Australian party system, Hale and Ironmonger Press, Sydney, p.449.
While the era fulfilled, even exceeded Labor’s expectations, the period’s bipartisan groove was disrupted, like much of Australian social life, by World War I. From the start, the conflict intersected with the nation’s politics, with Britain declaring war on Germany in the middle of Australia’s 1914 election campaign. At first, however, there was little difference between the two parties. Like Joseph Cook and the Liberals, Labor vowed to defend Great Britain with all of Australia’s martial power. While pockets of resistance to militarism existed, like in the socialist Industrial Workers of the World, most Australians shared this enthusiasm for imperial victory. Unique in the conflict, Labor won the election - the only working class party chosen to govern a nation’s war effort.

While the major parties broadly agreed on the need to assist Britain, Australia was less united on other responses to the war. These divisions foreshadowed a second adjustment to Australia’s party system, though from a different direction than in the nation’s first decade. This time, Labor was not the ascending force motivating other groups to change - pressure was now coming from within the party itself. Beyond the battle’s obvious social implications, the period undermined the party’s economic project, with wages stagnating as scarce consumer prices rose. But while Labor supported price controls in its 1914 campaign - a stance strongly backed by its union base - its position was complicated by the rise of Billy Hughes. The articulate, though often vituperative Hughes previously backed a referendum on prices, and even lead Labor’s early anger towards the “profiteers” and “bandits” he claimed were exploiting the war. But now, as Prime Minister after an exhausted Fisher quit parliament, and in the context of a hostile campaign by business groups, he considered the referendum too large a political risk. For the first time in the war, Labor went

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close to imploding. Hughes was censured by Labor’s federal executive, with the party only staying together after he threatened to leave it.\textsuperscript{35}

It was in this context, of severe distrust between Labor’s leadership and party apparatus, that the nation debated overseas military conscription. This was a controversial proposal, especially within Labor. For some in the party, the question involved principles of liberty and conscience, especially in the absence of similar demands being made on capitalists. For others, it symbolised the increasingly visible consequences of militarism, with opposition reflecting “dismay at what the war had become and Labor’s complicity in it”.\textsuperscript{36} As Prime Minister, Andrew Fisher resisted the idea, allowing men to volunteer, “but not urging them to do so”.\textsuperscript{37} Billy Hughes thought differently. Having just returned from a six month tour of Britain, surveying the war and meeting with its politicians, Hughes believed Australia could contribute much more to the imperial cause. Far from the ‘sordid trade war’ derided by its critics, he considered the conflict a force for spiritual improvement:

“This war that has plunged civilisation into an inferno, which has saturated the earth with the blood of our sons, has welded the scattered nations of Empire into one united people … We would not only emerge triumphant in this great struggle, but we would be purged of dross and purified by the spirit of self sacrifice. This war has saved the British Empire from moral - aye, and physical - degeneration and decay”.\textsuperscript{38}

Hughes supported a popular vote on conscription, as well as its ultimate introduction. So too did much of the country’s institutional establishment. Backing the ‘yes’ campaign was “all the major newspapers, five of the six state governments, the anti-labour politicians and most Protestant churches”; backing the ‘no’ campaign was other parts of Labor, most of the trade union movement,

\textsuperscript{35} Dyrenfurth, Nick, (2012), ‘Conscription is not abhorrent to Laborites and socialists’: revisiting the Australian labour movement’s attitude towards military conscription during World War I’, \textit{Labour History}, no.103, pp.145-164, p.155.
\textsuperscript{37} Horne, Donald, (1979), \textit{In Search of Billy Hughes}, Macmillan Press, Melbourne, p.61.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid, p.68.
as well as the Catholic archbishop, Daniel Mannix.\textsuperscript{39} Perhaps the most divisive debate in the nation’s short federal history, the campaign mixed questions of liberty and duty, nation and empire. The ballot, conducted in October 1916, surprised most commentators. With just over 51% of the vote, Australians rejected conscription.

From 1909 to 1916, Australian party politics revolved around economics and class. The conscription debate dissected this divide, complicating the bipartisan settlement established by “fusion”. With much of Labor campaigning against the proposition, questions of “order/disorder, loyalty/disloyalty, Australian/unAustralian” were for the moment as important as material politics.\textsuperscript{40} This ultimately ruptured the Labor Party. At a federal caucus meeting held in the vote’s aftermath, Hughes denounced Labor’s opposition to conscription. Rejecting an offer of internal compromise, he left the room, taking 24 of Labor’s 65 members with him.\textsuperscript{41} This was the first split in the party’s federal history, and the end of Labor’s wartime government. It was also the most significant challenge to the nation’s party system since 1909. After leaving Labor, Hughes formed the new ‘National Labor Party’, and governed with the temporary support of Cook’s Liberals, an alliance that later consolidated as the ‘Nationalists’. While still largely comprised of conservative politicians, the new party committed itself, at least rhetorically, to winning the war above all else. Class might have remained a significant, even primary reference point in party politics, but it was at this moment no longer supreme, and the new Nationalist government reflected this.

As well as ending the government, the split was also an electoral disaster for those who remained with Labor. Losing the support of eminent politicians - Chris Watson, for instance, left the party - the next era of politics was an incredibly lean one for the federal organisation. The party governed for just two of the next twenty four years. Even as the wartime cleavage subsided over time,

\textsuperscript{40} Brett, Judith, (2003), Australian liberals and the moral middle class, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, p.74.
\textsuperscript{41} Horne, Donald, (1979), In Search of Billy Hughes, Macmillan Press, Melbourne, p.80.
and the economic division reasserted itself, the Hughes split continued to
damage the party. By reinvigorating the politics of loyalty, the referendum
“contributed significantly to the Nationalist Right’s electoral hegemony and the
ALP’s subordination between 1917 and the Depression years”. Nationalism
itself, previously the preoccupation of the radical left, was now a powerful
argument for conservative politics. Labor entered the war in a position of
political strength, the only party of its kind granted wartime confidence. It left it
fractured, pulled apart by conscription, and banished to the electoral wilderness.

Lyons, Lang and the Depression (1916-1939)

If wartime pressures cracked the Labor Party, the era’s political fracturing was
not confined to the political left. On the right, the ‘Country Party’ emerged in
the years and elections following the war. By 1922, it held 14 seats and the
balance of power in the House of Representatives. While some supporters
initially hesitated over the new party, fearing it might undermine the Liberal
Party, its parliamentarians showed no reluctance about challenging the
Nationalists under Hughes. Believing the Prime Minister antagonistic to rural
interests, particularly on tariffs, the party offered the Nationalists confidence on
strict conditions: it would remove Hughes as Prime Minister, give Country MPs
five ministries, and choose its leader, Earl Page, as deputy Prime Minister. An
ambitious gambit, the Country plan worked. The Nationalists accepted the deal,
replacing Hughes with Stanley Bruce, and began a remarkably durable
institutional relationship in Australian party politics.

With the exception of federal Labor, the mid-1920s were a prosperous time for
most Australians. Bruce and the Nationalists governed for the next seven years,

42 Kirk, Neville, (2006), 'Australians for Australia': The Right, the Labor Party and Contested
Loyalties to Nation and Empire in Australia, 1917 to the Early 1930s', Labour History, no.91,
pp.95-111, p.95.
iss.2, pp.148-158.
44 Alexander, Fred, (1982), Australia since federation: a narrative and critical analysis, Thomas Nelson
Press, Melbourne, pp.61-63
45 Ellis, Ulrich, (1963), A history of the Australian Country Party, Melbourne University Press,
Melbourne, pp.87-97.
exploiting Labor’s wartime split, and linking it with new threats to national loyalty like the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. This run ended in the final months of the decade, however, when Bruce attempted to dissolve the Federal Arbitration Court, and Hughes and other Nationalists crossed the floor.46 On the 12th of October, 1929, just weeks before ‘Black Tuesday’ on Wall Street, James Scullin and Labor won their first federal election in 14 years. The timing was inauspicious. Scullin’s government “had barely taken office before the threatening depression deepened swiftly into a menacing reality”.47 Wool prices plummeted, and vulnerable British banks called in Australian debts. Local unemployment reached over 30% of the working age population. As Victorian MP Frank Anstey recalled, Labor found itself “sitting on the eggs of the serpent”.48

The economic cataclysm created social and political pressures which, like in World War I, Labor struggled to withstand as a coherent parry. Australians were split over how government should respond to the downturn, and on whose shoulders the burden for economic adjustment should rest. In the intensity of economic decline, civil groups arose to prosecute their case - the ‘All for Australia League’ on the middle class right, ‘socialisation units’ on the socialist left, as well as more ominous militia organisations, prophesying civil unrest.49 These differences also materialised within the Labor Party, which was divided on some recurring, fundamental questions. In the light of recession, what exactly was the party’s duty to class and nation - did these differ? - and what was its relationship with a capitalist system in crisis? In broad strokes, “the right-wing favoured orthodoxy with, if necessary, wage and pension cuts, while the left-wing opposed cuts and instead demanded that the fall in national income should

47 Ibid, p.84
be offset by credit expansion”. A third group advocated modest inflation, but within strict limits.

The arrival of Sir Otto Niemeyer to Australia, a representative of the Bank of England, only increased tensions within the government. Charged with inspecting the nation’s economic position, Niemeyer concluded that, for Australia to retain imperial confidence, it needed to actively reduce its “costs of production”. This meant cutting wages and government expenditure, with the goal of balancing the nation’s budget. Within the Labor caucus, Joseph Lyons, a former Premier of Tasmania and now the government’s acting Treasurer, was convinced that “only cautious and orthodox financial policies were advisable”, and was alarmed by what he considered the “dishonest schemes advocated by the minority in caucus”. For many trade unionists and much of the party’s rank and file, this Lyons trajectory represented a capitulation to the loathed ‘Money Power’ of British finance; a betrayal of the working class living standards the party pledged to protect.

Lyons struggled to reconcile his philosophy with more progressive approaches within the party. Some of them, like Ted Theodore, were moderate and considered; others, like Jack Lang, the Premier of New South Walesm were more radical and provocative. Having resumed his position as Treasurer, Theodore advocated a calculated expansion of monetary policy, which he considered a “middle course” between Niemeyer’s deflation and Jack Lang’s naive radicalism. The latter’s proposals represented a more direct attack on fiscal orthodoxy. Lang’s ‘Plan’, though at times inchoate, involved a refusal to pay interest on British debt until it was treated in the same way America processed British war loans. While more subtle than a simple ‘repudiation’ of financial

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contract, it was reported as such - a nuance not aided by the New South Wales Premier’s intemperate rhetoric. These different positions, made desperate by the deep recession, again splintered a first term Labor government.

In many ways, Labor’s second federal split was similar to its first. Ambushed by an international event that quickly outgrew its earlier plans, the party was fractured by divergent responses to crisis. But in other ways it was quite different. Where conscription challenged the dominant economic cleavage, the depression reinforced it. Instead, the urgency of recession amplified existing assumptions about politics and Labor’s place within it - and whether Labor’s economic policy should occur inside or outside accepted practices of capitalist management. The result, however, was much the same, though this time the party lost both its right and left flanks. Lyons, who resented both Theodore’s economic plan and recent personal history, left the cabinet and party in March 1931. The parallels with Hughes were obvious. Approached by a group of Melbourne conservatives, Lyons joined with Nationalist politicians to form the ‘United Australia Party’ (UAP). Like Hughes, he considered Labor overly ‘sectional’, focussed on class rather than nation, and claimed to transcend these divisions in the name of Australian unity. And also like Hughes, he became the new party’s founding leader, determined to stop Labor’s “cranky and amazing schemes”.

Not long after, Lang’s faction also left Scullin’s caucus. Following a by-election in East Sydney - where the Labor candidate, Eddie Ward, actively campaigned on Lang’s plan - MPs associated with the NSW Premier joined the parliamentary cross-bench. Though they initially retained parliamentary confidence in Labor, the ‘Lang’ MPs later crossed the floor in November, bringing down the government and triggering a new election. Held in December 1931, the ballot was an even bigger disaster for the party than 1917. With mutineers on both flanks, Labor lost more than two thirds of its seats to Lyons and the UAP, and

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government for a decade. Crisis had again exposed cracks in the party system. This time, however, it did not take a new, intersecting cleavage to fracture the party; the extremities of recession heightened divisions already latent within it. And for the second time, Labor possessed neither the infrastructure nor capacity to hold itself together as a coherent parliamentary force.

World War II, Communists and Catholics (1939-1972)

The first two splits in the Australian Labor Party were the result of external shocks. World War I and the Depression both remodelled Australia’s party system, splitting existing groups and creating new, composite ones. World War II offered a similar, potentially even larger disturbance, particularly with the proximity of Pacific conflict and its more credible threat of mainland invasion. What was noteworthy about the period, then, was that the party organisation remained relatively solid. The closest thing to a major shift in Labor’s position came in 1939, when Joseph Lyons offered it a place in a national wartime government. 57 Mirroring Winston Churchill’s ‘war ministry’, the proposal included representatives from both parties, and would halt partisan conflict while the war lasted. After Lyons died in April 1939, and was succeeded by Robert Menzies, the new Prime Minister again extended the offer to Labor’s leader, John Curtin.

If Labor was hostile to coalition politics under Fisher, the party was certainly suspicious of any ‘grand coalition’ arrangement with Menzies. At a special national conference called to debate the proposal, a majority of delegates rejected the idea. 58 Labor partisans considered it a political tactic, more cynical than acknowledged, designed to shield a struggling Menzies from critical opposition. 59 At the same time, Curtin was conscious of the kinds of internal disagreements that splintered the party under Hughes. He worried that forfeiting opposition would create a political vacuum to his left, “just waiting to be filled

59 Chester, Alan, (1943), John Curtin, Angus and Robertson Press, Sydney, p.81.
by Lang Labor and the Communist Party”.  

“A proposal has been canvassed that the Labor Party should enter a Commonwealth Government composed of representatives of all parties. We have no desire to enter such a Ministry and are reinforced by the fact that the people do not regard such an action as being a condition of our presence in Parliament. We will better be able to do our duty for the country, usefully and fearlessly, as unfettered watchdogs of the public interest”.  

On a purely electoral level, Curtin’s decision seemed to work. Within two years he was Prime Minister. Following the 1940 election, which ended in a hung parliament, United Australia depended on the confidence of two independents to govern; a confidence that was later retracted in 1941. The next eight years represented, at that point, Labor’s most prolonged period of federal success. Curtin governed as a wartime Prime Minister until his death in 1945, after which Ben Chifley oversaw economic ‘reconstruction’ until 1949.  

While these were popular years for Labor - the party won elections in 1943 and 1946, each with a sizeable majority - they were still not free of the kinds of internal instability that burdened previous governments. Changes in the broader party, particularly the growing influence of communists within organised labour, presented its parliamentary wing with certain challenges. Following a “massive campaign to penetrate Australian trade unions”, officials tied to the Communist Party of Australia now occupied important positions across the movement, often in strategically significant sectors like mining.  

While communist officials largely supported Australia’s goals during the war, even representing “model examples of trade union responsibility”, they became increasingly militant in peacetime. Many communist leaders believed “the time was ripe to mount the
decisive contest with the reformist ALP for the political leadership of the masses”.

Though communists were often gifted and ambitious advocates, critics claimed they now pursued strike action with minimal industrial content, designed primarily to express their political power over the Labor government. By any measure, their organising was a success. At the 1945 Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) congress, communists represented the dominant faction, able to command a majority with the help of other left forces.

This was different to earlier challenges to Labor unity. It began in the party’s wider structure, not parliamentary caucus, and was instigated by members of another organisation altogether. But with trade unions supplying over half the delegates to Labor conferences, it carried clear implications for the party. It was in this context that two strands of opposition emerged. The first came from Labor itself. After the ACTU conference, the party backed the creation of so-called ‘Industrial Groups’ - cells of Labor supporters in the union movement, organised to unseat communist officials. While Labor’s left flank initially resisted the idea, fearing it would benefit moderates, state parties eventually established the Groups in 1946. Group activists campaigned in union elections, recruiting Labor sympathisers and “supporting candidates in ballots who were loyal supporters of the Australian Labor Party”.

The second strand of resistance came from the Catholic Church. For many Australian Catholics, communist union growth complicated traditional political commitments. On one hand, the Church had come to view communism as something of an existential threat; materialistic and atheistic, committed to overturning cultural traditions like their own. On the other hand, due to their class profile, as well as sectarian conflict with more established Protestant churches, Australian Catholics were historically reliable supporters of Labor and

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The Church responded to this dilemma by establishing the ‘Catholic Social Studies Movement’, or ‘Movement’ for short. Led by B.A Santamaria, though kept largely secret, the group sought to “organise Catholic unionists, who would be urged to participate in their union's affairs and encourage their workmates to do likewise”. With the same basic agenda, the two memberships overlapped. One estimate suggested that “about 30 percent of the Group members were also in the Movement, while 60 percent or so would have been at least nominally Catholic”.

The communist influence in trade unions was wide, but ultimately shallow, owing more to disciplined organisation than broad rank and file support. So when the Groups began to develop their operation, success followed relatively quickly. By the 1949 ACTU congress, non-communists again held a comfortable majority. But while this was a clear victory for Labor, it did not necessarily eradicate the divisions within the party. In fact, it established a new, more consequential one. The so-called ‘Groupers’ - mostly Catholic, hardened by the union struggle, stridently anti-communist - now carried significant power in the party apparatus. After 1952, they held executive majorities in Victoria and New South Wales, the nation’s most populous states. This influence placed the Groups in a tense relationship with Labor’s opposition leader, Dr H.V Evatt, who they viewed with suspicion. After Evatt campaigned against the referendum to ban the Communist Party in 1951, even challenging it personally in the High Court, many Group activists felt Evatt was ‘soft’ on communism. By 1954, having just lost a close and painful election, Evatt felt cornered by the Groups and alienated in the caucus. With the party divided over his leadership, the opposition leader released a statement he hoped would “bring the incipient division into the open, expose the Movement … rally the anti-Grouper forces, and once and for all settle the issue of control in the ALP”:

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74 Ibid, p.11.
“In the election, one factor told heavily against us - the attitude of a small minority group of members, located primarily in the state of Victoria, which has, since 1949, become increasingly disloyal to the Labor movement and Labor leadership … Adopting methods which strikingly resemble both Communist and Fascist infiltration of larger groups, some of these groups have created an almost intolerable situation - calculated to deflect the Labor movement from the pursuit of Labor objectives and ideals”.75

Historians interpret Evatt’s decision to confront the Movement differently. Some consider it irrational, based on flimsy evidence, even an early sign of his later dementia.76 Others take the Movement threat more seriously, suggesting its leaders harboured a genuine ambition to convert the party to a Catholic social agenda.77 Whether true or not, Evatt’s statement triggered another shift in Labor and the national left. Judging it an act of provocation, as well as carrying hints of sectarian bigotry, Groupers boycotted party conferences, and eventually the party altogether. While it took over a year to finalise, the defectors eventually established a competing organisation, the ‘Democratic Labor Party’ (DLP).

As Don Aitken argues, “it is hard to write concisely about [the DLP split], because like an onion it has many layers”.78 While positioned within the wider context of post-war international relations, unlike World War I and the Depression, the change did not follow any single shock, nor did it depend on a single political choice. Because of this, scholars present different explanations of the events surrounding the split. Some place the threat of communism at the centre of their account, or at least its perception among Catholics. In this view, certain Catholics defected from Labor because of the essential incompatibility of communism and their faith, and a belief that Evatt was ambivalent about their

concerns. Other scholars take a longer view, however, emphasising socioeconomic changes that often predated the communist issue. These researchers point out that a particular group of Catholics supported the DLP, “the upper strata of the working class and the lower strata of the middle class”. In their view, this was the real context of the split. A group of Catholics had lost their working class identity, and were already beginning to realign themselves politically. The new party “provided the facade for the transfer of allegiances to a more economically conservative wing of the Labor movement”.

While these two interpretations could be plausibly combined - with the latent economic change finding expression in the communist threat - the electoral consequence of the split was again grim for Labor. In marginal seats, the Democratic Labor Party directed its second preferences to the Coalition, contributing to Labor’s record twenty three straight years in opposition. It did this to “erect a roadblock of DLP votes across the ALP’s path and so deny it the fruits of office … to wage a war of attrition against the ALP and so compel it to break its communist connections”. While political scientists debate the precise influence of these preferences, most accept that they made Labor’s position more difficult; particularly at the 1961 and 1969 elections, when the party comfortably received more primary votes than the Coalition. Again, a clear line could be drawn between conservative hegemony and structural crack in the left vote. In this case, it was made far worse by the split’s deep antagonism, and the DLP’s decision to support Menzies over Labor.

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Labor’s long wait in opposition finally ended in 1972, with Gough Whitlam’s election. This coincided with the decline of the Democratic Labor vote, which fell to just five percent, a taste of the electoral decimation it would receive in 1974.\textsuperscript{85} A modern campaign, employing contemporary advertising and electoral tactics, Whitlam’s election hinted at other changes slowly moving through the party system. While the Labor government legislated much of the traditional ‘social democratic’ agenda - introducing socialised healthcare, free university tuition, urban and regional infrastructure - it also supported issues associated with the so-called ‘new politics’. The government advanced policies touching on the role of women, environmentalism, Indigenous affairs, culture and the arts. In the years preceding his election, an increasingly visible, educated and often progressive middle class articulated ‘post material’ policy demands - and Whitlam moved to integrate them into Labor’s platform.\textsuperscript{86} Because of this, as well as his personal background - the privately educated son of a government solicitor - scholars describe Whitlam as a “transitional” leader, who contributed to the “middle classing” of the Australian Labor Party.\textsuperscript{87}

While Whitlam’s three years in power remain a touchstone for progressive politicians, they came to an infamous end in 1975. After the combative Senate refused to pass a supply bill, the Governor General dismissed Whitlam’s government, triggering a constitutional crisis and polarising an already divided country. Amid this social upheaval, a new party formed, though not obviously of the left or right.\textsuperscript{88} While led by a defecting Liberal politician, Don Chipp, the ‘Australian Democrats’ presented itself as a ‘centre-line’ grouping; opposed to the bureaucratic influence of both big business and trade unions. Founding members floated alternative names like the ‘Practical Idealists’ and the ‘People

for Sanity’, suggesting a sensible, almost apolitical party, unblemished by the era’s volatility. Once organised, it gained immediate electoral traction. The Democrats won five Senate seats at the 1980 election. Though the party chose not to participate in governing coalitions, “from 1981 to 2005, the Democrats either held outright, or shared with other minor parties, the balance of power in the Senate”.

The Democrats were always a difficult party to categorise. Chipp described their mission as “keeping the bastards honest”, and this one was one way of defining their purpose; as a moderating influence, a force for accountability among parliamentary extremes. The question of what exactly to moderate, though, was always an awkward one for its representatives, particularly on economic policy. Formed partly in opposition to sectional economic agendas, the Democrats lacked a strong material bearing. These tensions were visible from the party’s early, tentative response to the 1981 budget; they became more urgent in 1998, when the party’s leadership and membership clashed over its support for John Howard’s Goods and Services Tax (GST). This indecision was less evident in social policy, however, where the party possessed a more distinct identity. Scholars describe the Democrats as a “socially liberal”, or “post material” party, supporting many of the new politics issues backed by Whitlam. The party promoted “a general liberalism on moral matters … holding quite liberal views on social welfare, homosexuality and abortion”. It vocally supported environmentalism, opposing nuclear energy and uranium mining. The party’s demographics also broadly traced the ‘new’ middle class. Its voters were generally tertiary educated, young, and liberal.

Unlike earlier changes to the party system, the rise of Democrats corresponded with Labor electoral success - its longest ever, from 1983 to 1996, under Prime

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93 Ibid, pp.318-320.
Ministers Bob Hawke and Paul Keating. Contrary to the hostile DLP, the Democrats began with a largely neutral stance on preferences. At certain close elections, particularly Bob Hawke’s in 1990, their presence actually helped Labor, with an “unbelievable preference drift” of Democrats votes allowing it to hold office. This was the first time the preferential system provided a net benefit to Labor, and other, smaller groups also aided the party. Though still a loose association of state organisations, the ‘Greens’ ran candidates around Australia, and explicitly directed their preferences to Hawke. In many ways, the Greens inhabited a similar political space to the Democrats, promoting an environmental, as well as socially liberal policy agenda. Bob Brown later admitted that these similarities delayed the party’s federal success, with Greens sympathisers happy enough to support the Democrats in Parliament. In 1991, the Greens even approached the Democrats about forming a joint federal organisation, the ‘Green Democrats’. But while Janet Powell, the Democrat leader, expressed interest in the merger, a number of her MPs opposed it - and the deal was eventually blocked within the party.

While the national Greens formed “relatively late”, at least compared to parties in Europe, the environmental infrastructure underpinning it had been building for decades. Bob Brown compared the rise of the Greens to Labor’s growth in the 19th century, and in at least one way this was true: unlike many new parties, the Greens began as a social movement, outside parliament, and only afterwards chose to enter electoral politics. Greens histories generally trace its origin back to 1972, with the campaign to save Tasmania’s Lake Pedder. As part of its modernisation agenda, the state Labor government planned on damming the lake, creating a hydroelectric plant to provide cheap electricity to local industry. While conservationists opposed the project, for the first time expressing genuine “alternative visions” to Tasmania’s industrial consensus, protesters lacked the

political clout to stop it, and the government succeeded in flooding the area.\textsuperscript{100}

It was in the aftermath of this failed campaign that activists established the ‘United Tasmania Group’, widely considered the world’s first ‘green’ party. Running candidates in state elections, it did relatively well as a third party, but not well enough to gain legislative representation.

These failures did not, however, stall the broader movement’s momentum. Within a decade, environmentalists again challenged the state government, when the Liberal Premier, Robin Grey, announced the construction of another dam. More than Lake Pedder, the Franklin River campaign became an epochal environmental struggle, “the moment when ecological politics entered the mainstream”.\textsuperscript{101} With more experience and tactical sophistication, conservationists blockaded the development, often placing themselves physically between the machinery and landscape. Many, like Bob Brown, were arrested and imprisoned. Set in front of the dramatic, cascading river, the confrontations frequently lead the nightly news.\textsuperscript{102}

With an unprecedented national profile, the Franklin River became a decisive issue at the 1983 federal election. Bob Hawke promised to intervene to stop the dam, while Malcolm Fraser did not. As a result, environmental groups ran a marginal seat campaign to support Labor and its policy. According to Graham Richardson, who later became the government’s Minister for the Environment, Hawke instinctively sensed that conservationists were “natural [Labor] allies … that had to be brought into the tent”.\textsuperscript{103} While Hawke remained in office, Labor maintained this close relationship with the movement. Richardson described it as the “perfect convergence” for the party, as “what was right was also popular”.\textsuperscript{104} As Minister, Richardson secured heritage status for the Daintree Rainforest, greater protection for the Kakadu National Park, and blocked a controversial pulp mill in Tasmania. Beyond the ethics of preservation,
Richardson’s actions were tactical, designed to subdue the Green challenge, while gaining enough preferences to win elections. The 1990 vote was a clear success for Richardson’s strategy. In what became known as the ‘green election’, the environment “not only influenced initial support for minor parties and candidates directly linked to the green banner, it also had a significant if modest effect on the final choice between the two major parties”.\(^\text{105}\)

If the federal Green story in the 1980s revolved around extra-parliamentary cooperation with Labor, it was different in Tasmania. By the 1989 state election, after two decades of major environmental conflict, ‘Green independents’ held five seats in the Legislative Assembly, as well as its balance-of-power.\(^\text{106}\) With neither major party gaining a majority, the hung parliament offered Greens MPs their first opportunity to decide government in Australia. Despite attempts to block their influence - the Liberal Premier asked the Governor General to call a fresh election; a prominent businessman attempted to bribe Labor politicians into changing parties - the Greens chose Labor and its leader, Michael Field.\(^\text{107}\) Codifying the arrangement, the two parties signed a formal ‘Accord’, the first of its kind in Australia, and a precursor to the document Julia Gillard and Bob Brown signed two decades later.\(^\text{108}\) The deal lasted 409 rocky days. While the ‘Accord’ involved serious and wide ranging environmental concessions, much of Labor’s union base oppose the relationship, which they thought jeopardised the state’s industrial viability.\(^\text{109}\) An uncomfortable Field compared the situation to a “forced marriage”.\(^\text{110}\) This tension finally spilled over in October 1990, when Labor announced its forestry strategy, which Greens politicians claimed was in


The first attempt at formal Labor and Greens relations ended in acrimony, with Labor in particular considering the experiment a failure.

While the Tasmanian experience was Australia’s most prominent, other state parties emerged under different conditions. The Greens did not unite as a national party until 1992, and each branch developed its own character, without “one overarching monoculture”. With its grounding in conservation campaigns and its early electoral success, the Tasmanian branch promoted a relatively conventional ecological politics, combined with a strong emphasis on centralised organisation and parliamentary leadership. The New South Wales branch evolved differently. Growing out of the “turbulent, urban environmental and left politics of inner-city Sydney”, the branch maintained close ties with socialist activists and the post-communist economic left. Its members criticised the Tasmania faction for advocating a centralised, national organisation; in return, the Tasmanian branch criticised New South Wales for taking the party too far left, away from the movement’s environmental roots. The Western Australian party originated out of its own existing constellation of political groupings. Many of its activists joined after the Nuclear Disarmament Party (NDP) collapsed in 1985, eroded from the inside by factional disputes. Like the state at large, the branch also valued independence, only joining the national organisation in 2003.

Early Greens activists liked to borrow a line from the German Greens, that the movement was “neither left or right, but in front”. This implied that Greens politics was qualitatively new, a clean break from the existing order. But while the party did introduce an unprecedented environmental commitment to

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Australian politics, scholars debated the statement, presenting different interpretations of the Green ideological and social lineage. Did the party’s electoral profile simply reflect a growing environmental consciousness, with the rising salience of green issues? Or did it embody a more complex ‘new left’ cleavage, tracing ‘post material concerns beyond conservation and social democracy? 

As the Accord experience showed, early Greens politicians did use parliamentary influence to secure ecological outcomes. But at the same time, these representatives also promoted a broader set of post material priorities. In Tasmania, the party harnessed its position to support gay law reform, overturning the state’s notoriously homophobic policies.116 From 2001 onwards, early federal Greens Senators denounced the Howard government’s asylum seeker regime, describing it as “barbaric … akin to the penal colonies of two centuries ago”.117 But while these positions broadly aligned with the Democrats and social liberalism, the Greens diverged from its fellow minor party on economic policy. Unlike the Democrats, the Greens possessed clear “roots in social democracy”; supporting economic redistribution, trade union rights, and the public provision of services.118 Different traditions existed within the party, with more or less radical and pragmatic tendencies, but its leaders generally advocated some form of “democratic control over the economy”.119 When asked, voters also thought the two minor parties possessed different ideologies. Where surveys of Australians judged the Democrats to be centrist, positioned between Labor and the Liberal Party on a ‘left-right’ scale, they consistently placed the Greens to Labor’s left.120 Green activists agreed, telling researchers they were members of a left wing organisation.121

116 Milne, Christine, (9th of August, 2016), personal interview.
For most of the 1990s, the federal Greens remained in the shadow of the Democrats. This dynamic changed towards the end of the decade, however, particularly after the Democrats struggled to respond coherently to the GST in 1999. Its decision to support the tax, but with concessions over coverage, split the party’s parliamentary caucus, as well as its broader membership; triggering prolonged conflict between different arms of the organisation. From 1998 to 2004, the party’s vote fell from eight to two percent. The loss was the Greens’ gain. Buoyed by the newly vacated political space, the party’s vote grew steadily. While it previously possessed a moderate Senate representation - beginning in Western Australia after the NDP’s dissolution, moving into Tasmania - the Greens registered its highest vote in 2004, at over seven percent. This made it the third most popular party in Australia, ahead of the well-established Nationals. In 2007, when Kevin Rudd won office, its Senate vote rose to over nine percent, enough to win five seats and the major share of the upper house’s balance of power. On election night, having directed preferences to Labor, Bob Brown welcomed Rudd’s victory, pointing to marginal seats where Greens support helped change government. Expressing enthusiasm for the next three years, as well as the party’s new position of influence, Brown told Kevin Rudd that “we Greens are devoted to this country and its future, we will not work against your government, we will not work for your government, but we’ll certainly work with your government”.

Conclusion

While Australia’s party system can be characterised as comparatively stable - with the parties vying for government in 2007 either the same, or related to the ones competing in 1910 - its history is punctuated by periods of disruption and change. Even if elections still revolve around Labor and a non Labor opponent,

both look different to what they did at fusion; presenting different platforms, led by different people, and aggregating the support of different social groups.

On the Australian left, changes in the party system often corresponded with public splits, though these took different forms. Some followed external shocks, like World War I or the Depression, while others traced slower demographic changes, like Catholic social mobility or the rise of a “new” middle class; some originated in differences within parliamentary Labor, leading to elite defections and new organisations, while others emerged from social movements and their new political demands; some reinforced the dominant economic cleavage, while others introduced fresh lines of political contestation.

While these moments of dislocation changed the composition of parties, they also left a significant imprint on electoral history. Each of Labor’s three formal splits resulted in a period of parliamentary exile - over a decade in opposition after 1917, a decade again after 1931, and almost two decades after 1955. These were made worse by the deep antagonism of each split. Defectors either joined Labor’s opponents, or used their preferences to deliberately harm the party. The splits help explain Labor’s poor federal record, from World War I to the early 1970s.

One interpretation of the Greens is as a fourth, less visible split in the Australian left vote. While some Greens figures reject the label, the party’s progressive social and economic policies make it an identifiably left organisation. The Greens attachment to post material issues, as well as its social base in the progressive middle class, can be traced back through the Democrats and to Gough Whitlam’s electoral coalition. But in other, obvious ways, its emergence was different to earlier splits. The Greens evolved out of a social movement, not a rupture in the Labor Party, even if some activists moved between the two. It grew gradually, expanding alongside environmental consciousness and liberal social attitudes, not a single political moment. But despite these differences, the implications of earlier fractures in the two party system remain. While Labor resisted coalition politics at various points in its history, its electoral performance moved in concert with the nature of the changes in the left vote; whether hostile or sympathetic, confrontational or productive. Going forward, Labor’s
relationship with the Greens, now the third largest party in Australia, will likely possess a similar importance.
CHAPTER TWO
Two left traditions

When asked to situate Labor and the Greens on a spectrum, from ‘left’ to ‘right’, voters tend to place both on the political left - though with Labor closer to the centre and the Greens closer to the extreme.¹ But is this spectrum still useful? In the second half of the 20th century, scholars began to question the concept, debating whether it still captured a more complex political environment.² Some suggested that new, post material issues were complicating a political system established around economic conflict. The central political contest was shifting from “class to values”, they claimed, increasingly characterised by disputes over authoritarian and libertarian tendencies, rather than socialism and capitalism.³ Pushing the idea further, others suggested that politics was moving “beyond left and right”, with political commitments becoming reflexive - driven by personal identity formation, rather than social position.⁴ A second group of scholars defended the traditional model. In practice, they argued, the spectrum successfully managed to absorb new concerns.⁵ Contemporary movements still largely identified with a longer left tradition, and politics continued to gravitate around the same basic disagreement over equality and social hierarchy.⁶

Labor and the Greens might both be of the left, but they possess different histories, affiliate with different organisations, and present their own priorities and ideas. This chapter examines the two traditions, suggesting three frameworks for understanding the Australian relationship. Individually, these frameworks do not seek to explain all partisan behavior, nor do they imply the parties will always take opposing positions. They are better thought of as stylised

¹ McAllister, Ian and Cameron, Sarah, (2014), Trends in Australian Political Opinion: Results from the Australian Election Study, 1987-2013, Australian National University, Canberra.
² Kitschelt, Herbert and Hellemans, Staf, (1990), The left-right semantics and the new politics cleavage, Comparative Political Studies, vol.23, iss.2, pp.210-236.
dichotomies, tools to make their interactions more legible. Firstly, using the literature on ‘new’ and ‘old’ left politics, it suggests the two parties could react to post material issues in different ways. Secondly, examining the research on party types, it suggests the two could possess different underlying approaches to politics and social change. Thirdly, analysing the literature on organised labour and environmentalism, it suggests that conservation issues could strain the relationship, particularly when green outcomes are seen to undermine employment.

Framework one: ‘material’ and ‘post material’ politics

The Australian Labor Party formed in the 1890s, in the middle of deep recession that heightened economic conflict between unions and employers. The Greens formed eighty years later, politicised by environmental campaigns and their own, often post material set of demands. Political scientists describe this as the distinction between the old and new lefts, with one originating in the organised working class, and the other in the progressive middle class. This section examines the interaction between Labor, the Greens and different social groups, suggesting that these dynamics could produce different attitudes towards material and post material issues; with the Greens embracing the ‘new politics’ with enthusiasm, and Labor reacting to the same issues with caution.

For much of twentieth century, politics in developed democracies traced a similar social ‘cleavage’ to that which fusion established in Australia. These cleavages - divisions within society, themselves the product of divergent identities and interests - structured party competition and informed partisan identification. Lipset and Rokkan mapped these divisions in their early study of party conflict, from the beginning of democratic history to the post-war era. According to their research, democratic competition initially revolved around

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what they called “territorial” concerns, with parties grouped around localities and their associated values. This changed, however, with the expansion of suffrage to working class men. With this shift, political conflict began to orbit around “functional” questions of class. In elections, working class people tended to vote for left wing parties who supported the redistribution of wealth and economic power, while middle and upper class people tended to vote for right wing parties opposed to social reorganisation. According to Lipset and Rokkan, once this established itself, politics proceeded to ‘freeze’ in the dynamic for the next 40 years (“the party systems of the 1960s reflect, with few but significant exceptions, the cleavage structures of the 1920s”). Or as Lipset put it in an earlier work:

“In every modern democracy, conflict among different groups is expressed through political parties which basically represent a ‘democratic translation of the class struggle’ ... even though many parties renounce the principle of class conflict or loyalty, an analysis of the appeals and their support suggests that they do represent the interest of different classes”. 9

Beginning as the parliamentary arm of trade unions, the Australian Labor Party represented a comparatively early version of this class model.10 With its mass membership, binding pledge and union infrastructure, Labor’s success pushed competing, generally middle and upper class forces to ‘fuse’ in opposition to its labourist politics.11 Social democratic parties in other nations presented a similar model, with varying degrees of electoral success.

If Lipset and Rokkan believed that politics was “frozen” in this class struggle, at least at their time of writing, later observers thought they saw signs of thawing. In a series of studies beginning in the early 1970s, Ronald Inglehart claimed that Western societies were experiencing a “silent revolution”; a transformation in the “political cultures of advanced industrial societies, [which] seems to be

altering the basic value priorities of given generations”. 12 A new cleavage was emerging, complicating the existing political arrangement organised around economic interests. Borrowing from Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs, Inglehart claimed that post war affluence was breeding a generation with no experience of material scarcity. Under these comfortable circumstances, unburdened by the memory or threat of deprivation, younger, usually middle class people were “acting in pursuit of goals which no longer have a direct relationship to the imperatives of economic security”. 13 Inglehart described these as “post-acquisitive” or “post-bourgeois” values, denoting a commitment to aesthetic and intellectual goals, as well as the politicisation of identity. For Inglehart, these trends carried clear political implications. If party competition assumed the primacy of economic values, then the post material turn among the middle class could prove a disruptive force:

“[it] might encourage the development of new political parties, relatively responsive to emerging value cleavages. Or it might lead to a realignment of the social bases of existing political parties, making age an increasingly important basis of cleavage (during a transitional period) and eventually, perhaps, tending to reverse the traditional alignment of the working class with the Left, and the middle class with the Right”. 14

Other researchers supported Inglehart’s broad case, observing a rising post material sentiment across advanced democracies. One prominent claim was that the “silent revolution” was creating a bifurcated political left, riven between the old and the new, the economic working class and the post material middle class. Russell Dalton argued that the 1980s party system was stuck between “two ages”. 15 On one hand, a remarkable post-war improvement in wealth, combined with a commensurate growth in white collar employment, was steadily eroding the foundations of the economic old politics cleavage. The industrial working class was neither as numerous or as coherent as it once was. On the other hand,

13 Ibid, 991.
14 Ibid, p.1009.
younger generations were paying more attention to a new set of political issues, “focussed on non-economic, qualitative, reformist and lifestyle concerns, the issues of the new politics”.16 Examining the West German experience, Dalton argued that, while the major parties had integrated some of this agenda, significant structural adjustment remained on the political horizon. Scott Flanagan agreed with this central thesis, but added another dimension. While acknowledging that social change was helping forge a new left - whose agenda included “liberalizing abortion, women's lib, gay rights, and other new morality issues; protecting the environment, anti-nuclear weapons, and other quality-of-life issues; and support for protest activities, more direct forms of participation, and minority rights” - so too did it create a new right.17 These new conservative groups arose to defend traditional social morality, in opposition to the cultural changes backed by progressives.

Using slightly different language, Nancy Fraser also affirmed Inglehart’s revolution. Writing for the New Left Review, Fraser defined the era as “post-socialist”, where the pursuit of “recognition” now trumped the politics of “redistribution”:

“The ‘struggle for recognition’ is fast becoming the paradigmatic form of political conflict in the late twentieth century. Demands for ‘recognition of difference’ fuel struggles of groups mobilized under the banners of nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality. In these ‘post-socialist’ conflicts, group identity supplants class interest as the chief medium of political mobilisation”.18

Political scientists and sociologists debated the transformation’s intricacies. Did post material politics precipitate a partisan dealignment, with voters losing attachments altogether, or did it spur realignment, with new classes identifying with particular parties?19 Were the old and new lefts compatible and could they

16 Ibid, p.108.
ultimately work together? On Inglehart’s central contention, however, they largely agreed. A new political dimension, beyond the confines of economic struggle, was becoming increasingly influential in mature democracies. No longer could economic concerns associated with class explain the majority of political behaviour. Even Seymour Lipset, in an update to his book *Political Man* published in 1980, admitted that political cleavages had become much more complex than 20 years earlier:

“The reform elements concerned with post materialist or social issues largely derive their strength not from the workers and the less privileged, the social base of the left in industrial society, but from the affluent segments of the well-educated, students, academics, journalists, professionals and civil servants. Thus there are now two Lefts, the materialist and the post materialist, which are rooted in different classes”.

The parallels between this “silent revolution” and ecological political parties did not escape students of the burgeoning movement. Greens parties possessed clear similarities to the new left, both in ideology and demography. For one, concern about environmental degradation was often cited as the archetypal new politics cause - particularly opposition to nuclear power in the 1970s and 1980s, which motivated both new left activists and early green parties. But more importantly, and contrary to some early expectations, the green political agenda went on to expand beyond environmentalism. As Kitschelt noticed, European green parties were beginning to embrace many other ‘new politics’ causes:

“It quickly turned out, however, that ecology parties did adopt a variety of other characteristic political stances, such as strong support for women’s emancipation, civil rights and minority protection, a comprehensive welfare state, disarmament and assistance to less developed countries”.

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Kitschelt added that this was not a mere choice, but often a precondition for green electoral survival. “Whenever green parties dissociate from broader electoral affinities”, he argued, “they tend to be electorally unsuccessful”.23 Thomas Poguntke study of the German Greens came to a similar conclusion. Examining the party’s platform, he argued that its policy demands reflected a complex new political cleavage, not simply a rising environmental consciousness. “[There is] empirical evidence for the proposition that the German Greens do indeed represent a new, distinct type of political party, which is primarily the product of shifts towards the new politics”.24 In his view, it was a new left party because it met four tests: ideology (with a preference for ecological preservation over economic growth; an emphasis on individual self expression at the expense of social order; and a rejection of political hierarchy), participatory organisation (by valuing local participation over centralised command), unconventional political style (by defending extra parliamentary tactics like protests and civil disobedience) and its demographic profile.25

As with the ideological parallels, this demography also resembled the “new middle class” outlined in Inglehart’s work. Surveys of green supporters showed that they tended to come from a specific social context, one distinct from the working class historically associated with the old left. As Kitschelt’s study of European parties found:

“The parties primarily draw on young, highly educated voters who tend to be employed in the public sector of personal services and production of cultural symbols. Their supporters believe that advanced democracies should devote more effort to increase citizens’ autonomy and democratic involvement than to improve physical security and material prosperity”. 26

National green parties traced a similar demographic outline. Bennulf’s examination of the Swedish Greens concluded that, while the party might not

23 Ibid, p.94.
25 Ibid, chapter one.
be solely comprised of “yuppies” as some critics liked to suggest, its following had a “distinctly middle class or even upper middle class flavour … concentrated among the new middle class of public sector, white-collar, well-educated, city-dwellers”. In Germany, the profile was largely the same. And while Muller-Rommel pointed out that some early green parties drew support from modestly educated rural citizens, he also showed that most contemporary parties attracted voters who were “younger, highly educated, and occupy white collar and government jobs where the traditional class conflict is virtually non existent”.

In Australia, studies of the local Greens also drew explicit links between this new cleavage and political support. Vromen and Turnbull’s analysis of Greens members found them to be highly educated and overwhelmingly located in professional occupations (though, in their sample, not necessarily younger - the average member was in their late 40s). When studies extended their focus to voters, these links became even more apparent. As Bruce Tranter showed in a statistical analysis of the party’s supporters, “younger people, the tertiary educated, professionals, city dwellers, the nonreligious and the self-assessed middle class are likely to vote Green”.

If the Australian Greens shared these characteristics with foreign green parties, they also shared them with the now defunct Australian Democrats, especially the concentration of tertiary educated and post material voters. This lead some scholars to question whether the Greens had “replaced” the minor party in the federal Senate, claiming its social base after it collapsed. But where the

Democrats often lacked a “strong ideological basis”, the Australian Green agenda was heavily grounded in new left ideals from its inception. The party’s “four pillars”, a philosophical statement it shared with a number of other green parties, focused overwhelmingly on goals associated with the post material left: ‘ecological sustainability’, ‘grassroots participatory democracy’, ‘peace and nonviolence’ and ‘social justice’. As Vromen and Turnbull argued, this constituted some of the party’s “novelty”, as a challenge to the materialism of the established left and labour movement.34 Unlike other parties, influenced by institutional history and a more disparate social base, the party could express a form of new left politics without conflict or reservation. In practice, this novelty manifested itself as a vocal and unambiguous commitment to causes like feminism, Indigenous reconciliation, multiculturalism and the rights of people with diverse sexualities.

But while greens parties traced this new politics cleavage relatively cleanly, reflecting both its social profile and political goals, new left politics has not been completely inaccessible to older, social democratic parties. Though their interactions with these issues have been uneven, parties associated with old left still engage with them to various degrees. As Brigid Meguid argued, the success of new parties in exploiting these social demands often depended on the behaviour of existing ones. When a new set of issues arises, “established parties must decide whether to recognise or respond to the issue introduced by the niche party”.35 They can either choose to dismiss it as peripheral or irrelevant, or compete for it as a stronger, more reliable representative. Robert Rohrschneider explored this dynamic in the context of the political left. In his view, the two factors influencing the success of new left parties were electoral institutions and the “behaviour of the major old left party”:

“New party realignments are likely if established parties are unresponsive and institutional factors do not shield established parties from minor party

competition. However, if Old Left parties respond favorably to new issues, the odds for Old Left realignments increase".  

These studies suggested that established parties, while founded on different concerns, possessed some capacity to respond to post material sentiments. Or as McAllister and Studlar put it, “parties [are] not simply passive recipients of social support, but energetic actors, constantly shifting and adapting their ideological positions to preserve and maintain their electoral bases”. In their view, this potential for malleability was primarily concentrated among party elites. If party strategists decided to integrate new popular demands into their agenda, they were “more likely to preserve their position within the party system … and effect a transformation of the cleavage structure without a corresponding change in the party system”. 

Studies of the Australian Labor Party usually observed some degree of ‘old left’ adjustment. McAllister and Studlar examined Labor in the early 1990s and found that, when Hawke and Richardson embraced environmentalism, support for the Australian Democrats halved. In their judgement, “Labor had effectively captured this issue from the Democrats and the Greens”. This process began in earnest two decades earlier, when the Whitlam government incorporated a number of new left demands into Labor’s platform. While facing internal opposition, Whitlam supported equal pay for public sector women, improved access to contraception and family planning, and even established a Royal Commission into the state of Australian relationships. His government introduced the Racial Discrimination Act, instituted no-fault divorce, and ratified the World Heritage Convention. Elevating cultural policy, Whitlam gave unprecedented funding to the arts, and broke symbolic ties with the British

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38 Ibid, p.198.
monarchy.⁴¹ These issues changed the party’s composition, with new middle class activists joining local branches.⁴²

Still, the process of engaging with new politics presented dilemmas for social democratic parties. For one, it was unclear how their traditional constituency, working class voters and organised labour, would feel about the changes. This was linked to Inglehart’s prediction - that the rise of cultural issues could undermine the established relationship between the working class and political left. As early as 1959, Lipset suggested that, while working class voters tended to be economically “liberal”, this did not always apply to “non-economic” issues:

“When liberalism is defined in non-economic terms - so as to support, for example, civil liberties for political dissidents, civil rights for ethnic and racial minorities, internationalist foreign policies, and liberal immigration legislation - the correlation is reversed”.⁴³

Lipset linked this illiberalism - or in his words, “working class authoritarianism” - to lower access to education, lower participation in political and voluntary organisations, economic insecurity, and authoritarian family patterns. In Lipset’s view, working class life was less likely to promote a positive view of cultural novelty compared with the experiences of the educated middle class. While contentious, the thesis did receive some support in other studies. Achterberg, for instance, examined the effect of different cleavages in contemporary democracies, as “old and new issues now compete for the attention of voters”. Achterberg found that, when cultural issues were politically salient, “the determining power of these new motives increased … causing workers to vote right and members of the middle class to vote left, as workers are generally more culturally conservative and less concerned with the environment than members of the middle class”.⁴⁴ Other cross national studies concluded that working class

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⁴² Brett, Judith, (2003), *Australian liberals and the moral middle class*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, chapter 6, “The New Middle Class”.
groups were more likely to accept the legitimacy of authority, and a duty of obedience towards it.\textsuperscript{45}

Critiques of Lipset’s thesis did not generally reject the phenomenon he observed. They instead challenged the causal role of class in explaining it. Houtman, for instance, argued that these studies instead captured the influence of education, which tended to correlate with forms of employment. While he acknowledged it was true that working class politics tended to be “characterised by economic liberalism and authoritarianism”, the statistical effect of class was generally negligible when controlled for schooling.\textsuperscript{46} Dekker and Ester similarly found a relationship between income, status and authoritarian views, but it was again rendered insignificant when controlled for education.\textsuperscript{47} In this view, Lipset’s statement was true “as a descriptive category”, but not as an explanation for the phenomenon. It was a lack of education, not one’s position in the labour market, that tended to produce authoritarian views.

Regardless of its cause, however, the political implication remained. Any ambivalence towards post material change among working class voters could potentially influence Labor decisions, as well as its relationship with the Greens. A divide between the old and new lefts, between a party originating in the working class and a party growing out of the educated middle class, could push Labor towards a more cautious stance on post material questions, especially when compared with a Greens party supporting them without concern or caveat. While this simplifies a more complex situation - since the late 1960s, Labor has embraced a number of new left issues, at least to some extent - it outlines a plausible partisan dynamic. Particularly as a larger, more disparate electoral coalition, seeking to win both the working and progressive middle classes, Labor could feel conflicted over the politics of cultural liberalism. The Greens are less likely to register this internal dissonance, with its base representing the vanguard of the new politics.

Framework two: ‘catch-all’ versus ‘movement’ parties

In both practice and self image, in organisation and parliamentary ambition, political parties diverge considerably. Some like the Australian Democrats might be content to “keep the bastards honest”, as Don Chipp put it, but others desperately want to be the bastards themselves. Different types of parties maintain different organisational structures, different relationships with civil society, and different ways of conceptualising their role in politics. This section examines the literature on political parties, providing a second framework for understanding Labor and Greens relations in Australia.

Discussions around modern parties usually begin with the ‘mass party’. This is partly because it was the original concept on which later theories built, but also because it is the popular image from which later models were seen to diverge. In his seminal study of the institution, *Political Parties*, Maurice Duverger examined the history of party organisations, particularly those that won elections.48 In his view, successful parties usually embodied one of two types. The first was the ‘cadre’ party. Originating in a period of limited suffrage and usually associated with the political right, these were organisations run by social elites; grouping “notables for preparing elections, conducting campaigns and maintaining contact with candidates”.49 As these loose parties usually represented establishment interests, who could bankroll campaigns, they rarely needed or even desired a broad and active membership. Their influence stemmed from their social prestige and financial capacity. But because this cadre model grew out of restricted franchise, the rise of universal male suffrage challenged its political dominance. In this new era, the ‘mass’ party was now viable. Mass parties possessed very different internal imperatives to their cadre opponents. Without the backing of wealthy elites, and expressing the political demands of the organised working class, these left wing groups needed large memberships to fund party activities, but also to educate and politicise their

49 Ibid, p64.
working class base. Unlike cadre parties, their strength grew in proportion with their size.

Looking back on this era, many nostalgically invoked the mass model as the gold standard of democratic party organisation. Duverger certainly believed the future belonged to them (because election campaigns revolved around mobilisation, he thought they offered the best structure for success, and that cadre parties would evolve in imitation). Writing a decade later, Otto Kirchheimer was less sure about this. Surveying post war European politics, Kirchheimer thought that Duverger’s mass party, which served as a “transmission belt between the population at large and the governmental structure”, was giving way to what he called ‘catch all’ parties. Rather than directly link social forces to the state, these groups increasingly saw electoral success as their chief goal:

“The mass integration party, product of an age with harder class lines and more sharply protruding denominational structures, is transforming itself into a catch-all ‘peoples party’. Abandoning attempts at the intellectual and moral encadrement of the masses, it is turning more fully to the electoral scene, trying to exchange effectiveness in depth for a wider audience and more immediate electoral success”.

Kirchheimer believed that a combination of affluence, consumer society and social mobility was creating an environment in which mass parties could shed their “ideological baggage”. Rather than seeking support from coherent, identified classes, the catch all party pursued multiple demographics and interest groups. In order to appeal to these different groups, they diluted their social demands accordingly. Kirchheimer was gloomy about this changing world. Instead of presenting voters with policies that reflected the “primordial need for sweeping political change”, they now resembled consumer brands, carefully

51 Ibid, p.164.
Kirchheimer was not the only figure to observe a change in party behaviour. Epstein, for instance, rejected Duverger’s prediction of a “contagion from the left”, the idea that conservative parties would mimic the electorally necessary mass model. He instead foresaw a “contagion from the right”, with socialist and social democratic parties regressing to the cadre model, losing their mass memberships, diluting their ideologies, and increasingly relying on mass, rather partisan media. Angelo Panebianco described a similar phenomenon with his image of the “electoral professional party”. According to the Italian political scientist, the most significant change to modern parties was internal, as they now hired experts to formulate policy and win elections, neutering the branch and “mass-bureaucratic” system that traditionally influenced decisions. More recently, Katz and Mair went a step further, arguing that major parties now constituted a “cartel”. Without ties to civil society, major parties relied on the state to fund their operations. And because both major parties faced a crisis if this assistance was ever removed, they colluded to continue the “interpenetration of party and state”. While emphasising different things, the three scholars shared a belief in the changing nature of major political parties. Each thought that Duverger’s mass organisation was turning into something distinct; it was now ideologically opaque, organisationally hierarchical, and designed first and foremost to win elections.

Certain Australians scholars identified a similar trend within their own political system. In a collection of essays assessing Katz and Mair’s relevance to the local experience, Ian Marsh argued that “the cartel party thesis seems an appropriate starting point from which to evaluate the significant recent developments in

Australia’s parties and party system … Australia’s parties seemingly show evidence of convergence in policy and in trends of campaigning, in interparty competition and intra party organisation”. In the same volume, Dean Jaensch argued that the Labor Party was progressively merging with the Liberal Party model. While the Liberals historically deferred to their parliamentary leadership, Labor was increasingly ignoring its declining membership and doing the same. Labor might have begun its life as the “archetype of the mass party”, but it was now modifying its ethos “to take on catch all characteristics”. These reflected a common narrative in popular media coverage, whether fair or unfair, that Australia’s bipartisan system was losing its conflictual edge, with the major parties now clashing over an increasingly small number of issues. Even Murray Goot’s comprehensive rebuttal of the ‘convergence thesis’ (which argued that, far from being new, the claim of “tweedledum and tweedledee” politics was very old - one usually made from the hard right and left, not the political centre) conceded that the idea was now “widely accepted”.

These kinds of contributions focused overwhelmingly on the nature of party change. Their purpose was to show how, from their beginning as ‘mass’ organisations with specific structures and attitudes, major parties evolved into something distinguishable from their origins. But as other, more contemporary writers pointed out, these studies only told half the story. By only examining major parties, they risked ignoring the rich variety of existing political organisations. As Steven Wolinetz put it, a “fascination with change” could “skew analytical capacities”. In his view, scholars were “better at characterising the ways in which certain parties have changed or evolved, than comparing differences and similarities among parties existing coterminously”. Building from this critique, these figures created their own frameworks, contrasting...
different contemporary forms. Diamond and Gunther, for instance, borrowed from biology to categorise parties in broad “genuses”, with more particular “species” underneath. Far from identifying a single model, their typology outlined fifteen different types of party, determined by their approach to organisation, strategy and policy. These varied from “electoralist” parties, built to win votes and government, to “movement” parties, the political manifestation of a social group committed to implementing an ideological vision. In a similar spirit, Wolinetz presented his own scheme, categorising parties based on political tactics. Modern parties were either “office seeking”, “vote seeking” or “policy seeking”. While conceding that, in practice, parties usually overlapped across multiple types - one could seek votes to win office, or seek office to pursue policy - he argued that the broad instincts were still central to understanding why parties behaved differently.

Both these frameworks recognised that, while major parties evolved throughout the twentieth century, their experience was not universal. Not all embraced the catch all model, nor were all part of the cartel, if such an entity could be judged to exist. Even if Kirchheimer, Epstein and Panebianco were correct, and major party politics was converging around electoral professionalism, this trend created the space for new challengers to the system - a point Katz and Mair acknowledged. Parties could embody different ‘types’ of political organisation, with different structures, inclinations and goals. It was also possible that these approaches to politics could help explain party interaction, in both parliament and at elections.

There is a considerable bank of literature examining the nature of the Australian Labor Party. Throughout its history, activists and scholars debated whether it constituted a mass socialist institution, or rather a managerial force for regulating capitalism. While not a new discussion, this reached a modern peak during the Hawke and Keating Labor government, from 1983 to 1996, when scholars

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questioned whether its pursuit of “economic rationalism” represented a
discontinuity for the party. Under Hawke and Keating, Labor deregulated
financial markets, privatised certain public assets, and reduced protectionist
tariffs. For Graeme Maddox, this constituted a new form of Labor politics. The
political scientist argued that its pursuit of deregulation, along with Hawke’s
stated belief in social consensus, meant the Labor government relinquished two
pillars of mass politics - a commitment to democratic socialism and a belief in
political adversarialism.64 Others, like Beilhartz, emphasised the retreat from
social democratic policy, and the party’s increasing acceptance of market logic.65
In Jaensch’s study of the government, The Hawke-Keating Hijack, the author
explicitly linked these trends to Kirchheimer’s thesis:

“The Labor Party is in a process of internal and external realignment
unparalleled at any other stage in its history. That is, not only has Labor
been remarkably successful electorally, but those who are in control are
attempting to forge a new ethos for the party, attempting to produce a
new type of ‘Labor’ party ... In essence, what appears to be in process is
an attempt to transform the Labor Party from a mass to catch-all party”.

These claims were often normative in nature and pessimistic in presentation.
The authors generally lamented the changes. But while this despondency
permeated the work, others rebutted their case, suggesting it was either nostalgic
or exaggerated. Haydon Manning argued that it underestimated Hawke’s
‘Accord’ process, and the central role given to trade unions.67 Carol Johnson
suggested that it misread the party’s history.68 From Chifley to Whitlam, Labor
governments always supported class harmony and a form of democratic
capitalism, even when this created conflict with certain trade unions and more
radical activists. But while these arguments challenged the discontinuity thesis,

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64 Maddox, Graham, (1989), The Hawke government and Labor tradition, Penguin Press,
Melbourne, chapter 2.
66 Jaensch, Dean, (1989), The Hawke-Keating Hijack: the ALP in transition, Allen and Unwin Press,
Sydney, p.154.
67 Manning, Haydon, (1992), The ALP and the union movement: ‘Catch-all’ party or
68 Johnson, Carol, (1989), The Labor legacy: Curtin, Chifley, Whitlam, Hawke, Allen and Unwin,
Sydney.
they did not necessarily discount some of its core contentions. It was just that, for Manning, they were blinkered, and for Johnson, they were already there. Johnson especially acknowledged that the ALP was an electoralist and pluralist institution at heart, one that recognised the need to engage with different interest groups in order to win elections and govern.

In Diamond and Gunther’s typology, this model of Labor governance best resembled the electoralist party. This species was similar in spirit to Panebianco’s electoral professional organisations, as well as the modern catch all party described by Kirchheimer, though without its normative judgment. According to Diamond and Gunther, electoralist parties were driven by an overriding desire to win government, accepting the need to “aggregate as wide a variety of social interests as possible”. While this meant their policy platform was flexible, the parties could still be more or less programmatic; possessing an “ideological agenda”, even if it was subject to public opinion and the influence of pressure groups. In Wolintez’ model, the vote seeking party followed more or less the same path. As with Diamond and Gunther’s theory, these parties focussed on winning elections, with “policies and positions not locked in … instead, they are regularly manipulated in order to maximise support”. Whether electoralist or vote seeking, the insight from both typologies was essentially the same - that a party committed to winning elections is likely to accept a level of pragmatism and policy malleability, responding to voters and social groups if deemed necessary to gain and hold government.

The literature on the Australian Greens is far less prolific. It also tends to highlight the party’s resistance to pragmatism. As Narelle Miragliotta argues, “radicalism is a firmly entrenched feature of the party, both programmatically and organisationally”. Unlike electoral professional organisations, the party consciously vests a significant amount of influence in its membership, a practice

that Vromen and Turnbull note is “quite different” to modern major parties. This devolution overlaps with the party’s intellectual origins, which challenged managerial solutions to political problems, dismissing pragmatic electoralism as an inadequate response to ecological crisis. As Miragliotta describes it, the party’s environmentalism “contends that the solution to the earth’s ills depends on the adoption of a radical set of strategies, rejecting both capitalism and communism and the tenets of unlimited economic growth”. And while this radicalism is often used as a pejorative to critique the Greens, it also functions a way for the party to distinguish itself from rivals - proof that it is indeed dedicated to “doing politics differently”. Unlike the major parties, generally more willing to accept compromise as part of a healthy political process, Greens politicians often reject the logic of pragmatism. They instead present it as the flaw of timid, mainstream politics.

This political model is, however, by no means static. As Stewart Jackson observes, since the Australian Greens established itself, winning more votes and gaining a stronger parliamentary presence, the party slowly moved towards Panebianco’s electoral professional model - concentrating greater power in elected officials and party administrators, who give greater consideration to electoral and parliamentary imperatives than members do. But even acknowledging this gradual trend, the Greens embody a qualitatively different type of party to modern Labor. In Wolinetz’s scheme, it mirrors the policy seeking party. While these organisations vary between groups with well defined programmes to those promoting single issues, they all “give greater priority to articulation and defence of their policies than either the maximisation of votes or the securing of office”. In Diamond and Gunther’s model, the Greens best resemble the movement party. Building on Kitschelt’s work, these groups

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“straddle the conceptual space between party and movement”. Challenging the trend towards party professionalisation, movement parties stress “constituency representation over the logic of electoral competition, making [them] a sometimes unpragmatic and unreliable coalition partner”. In both frameworks, policy seeking and movement parties define themselves in opposition to trends within major parties. They embrace a critique of electoralism, as well as party stratification, which they portray as stultifying and anti-democratic.

This literature suggests that, beyond the confines of normative ideology or affiliated institutions, Labor and the Greens might also represent entirely different types of political party, approaching politics and social change in fundamentally different ways. Labor might adhere to the demands of electoralism, aggregating diverse social interests to win parliamentary majorities, even if this means accepting a level of policy adaptability. In its desire to “do politics differently”, the Greens might view this tendency as a weakness, instead asserting policy goals above electoral calculations. This also might help explain differences in the policy process. When confronted with contentious policies, Labor might respond to social and political pressure with flexibility, while the Greens might view this instinct as a betrayal of their mission. Even if Bob Brown liked to insist that, rather than just “keep the bastards honest”, the Greens were in political life to “replace them”, Labor might still behave as a major institution of government, while the Greens might behave more like a social movement, challenging the system itself.

Framework three: ‘jobs versus the environment’

While the first two frameworks emphasised the institutional and electoral imperatives of parliamentary politics, the third focuses on wider party organisations, and the potential clash of interests between environmentalists and the labour movement. While Labor successfully aligned itself with

conservationists under Hawke in the late 1980s, other attempts proved more complicated, producing disagreements within the party. Scholars and popular commentators direct considerable attention to this collision, what researchers call the ‘jobs versus the environment’ dilemma. As both parties grew out of these respective movements - with trade unions still affiliated to Labor, and the Greens gaining much of its activist base from environmental campaigns - any animosity between the groups and their interests could also influence the parliamentary relationship.

In the post-war era, most developed countries experienced some form of “conflict between labor and environmental groups, based in part on the core need of unions to protect the jobs of their members”. After the early 1970s, as the western economic boom slowed and environmentalism gained support, these disputes became increasingly visible. Through the 1970s and 1980s, the two groups clashed in the United States, over oil pipelines, transport policy and land use. Scott Dewey even suggested this contributed to Ronald Reagan’s popularity among union members, who warmed to his simple pro-growth, anti-regulation message. In Europe, nuclear policy divided industrial unions and environmentalists, particularly in Germany and France. Whether fair or unfair, the perception that green policies undermined industries - by either closing them down through onerous regulation, banning practices outright, or sending them offshore to nations with lax standards - was influential enough to produce an uneasy relationship between the two movements.

Theories affirming this tension tended to focus on labour’s position in the production process. They often began with the observation that, within a capitalist economy, private sector employment relied on the profitability of private firms. This dependency still applied to companies producing

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environmental externalities; even companies that polluted ecosystems, extracted finite resources, and pressed biospherical limits. This created an obvious problem with green groups, who existed to oppose these exact practices. As Gould et al put it, unions could be instinctively “productivist”, seeking to defend and expand employment, “while environmentalists questioned the future of the current economic model in which those jobs might be created - [arguing] that economic expansion threatens the sustainability of life on the planet, and that development needs to be entirely rethought”.82

Allan Schnaiberg used the “treadmill of production” image to make a similar point.83 According to Schnaiberg, the modern economic and political order demanded perpetual growth, with the implicit assumption that “economic expansion is the core of any viable social, economic or environmental policy”.84 Politically, the treadmill was able to function because of the social consensus around it, with capital, the state and labour all supporting its essential goal. While often adversarial on pay and workplace conditions, trade unions tended to side with capital on questions of private sector profitability, hoping to “claim a share of the expanding wealth generated by the dynamic capitalist economy”.85 This again conflicted with environmentalists, who challenged the model’s sustainability. In the Club of Rome’s famous phrase, many conservationists believed in “limits to growth”.86 Within Schnaiberg’s theory of the treadmill, disputes tended to be localised - over a certain company, industry, or practice - but the actual ‘jobs versus the environment’ dilemma reflected a deeper divide over the social and ecological value of growth economics.

This tension was visible in early Tasmanian environmental history. The dispute over Lake Pedder involved immediate economic and labour interests - the dam was designed to produce cheap, surplus energy for industry - but it also reflected a more fundamental disagreement about development and human progress. According to Amanda Lohrey, a young Labor member in 1972, the state Labor party believed in the emancipatory power of technology:

“The dams were an awe inspiring marvel, something to be proud of, and the Tasmanian Labor politicians of the day were proud of them, seeing in the dams an emblem of how radical public spending could help lift a community out of the misery of the Depression years and into a better world”.  

These different philosophies were also present in Australia’s first experiment in Labor and Greens cooperation. When the Tasmanian parties signed their Accord after the 1989 election, they stopped short of establishing a more integrated coalition, partly because of internal Labor rules, but also partly because of union distrust towards the Greens on forestry policy. Despite this suspicion, however, the government’s first year in power was remarkably ‘green’. In order to secure office, Michael Field accepted a number of Greens environmental demands, many of which Labor implemented. After signing the agreement, the government expanded World Heritage Sites, declared a new National Park, and placed greater scrutiny on pulp mills. A decade later, Bob Brown, a Greens MLA at the time, remembered these as the Accord’s greatest achievements.

But while these changes were genuine, distrust between labour and environmental groups remained. Ongoing conservation disputes corroded the parliamentary relationship, and ultimately helped end the Accord. A month before the agreement finally collapsed, forestry negotiations between the

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government and conservationists broke down. In October 1990, Labor increased woodchip export quotas beyond those stated in the Accord, and the Greens decided to formally end the agreement (though its members continued to grant Field confidence until the 1992 election). According to Jim Bacon, the head of Tasmania’s Trades and Labour Council, and later a Labor Premier, unions would have liked a closer relationship with environmentalists, “but it won’t happen until they recognise that we have a responsibility to our members … putting conservation interests above that is a price we’re not prepared to pay”. With a combative end, most Labor figures considered the arrangement an obvious failure. Examining the Accord’s wreckage, one reporter asked whether “green and economic interests will ever be compatible?” “For now”, she answered, “it seems not”.

While part of the story, the Tasmanian experience was more complex than a simple case of irreconcilable labour and environmental interests. After all, the Accord included environmental demands, many of which were achieved in parliament. Because of ambiguities like this, a number of scholars reject the simple dichotomy, arguing that the relationship is more complex or compatible than the jobs versus the environment dilemma allows. These researchers note that, at least historically, trade unions promoted a number of environmental causes, particularly those relating to occupational health and local pollution.

While expressing a different form of environmentalism to the modern conservation movement - stressing human safety, rather than ecosystemic integrity or wilderness preservation - certain scholars present these workplace struggles as a parallel history of union environmentalism.

These historic campaigns for protection from economic pollution relate to a second argument about labour’s compatibility with green politics. Contrary to

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claims that labour inevitably sides with capital against environmental demands, another view holds that the two groups actually share an interest in regulating corporate influence; both fighting to impose democratic or social constraints on corporate activity. As Barca argues, labour unions and green groups are concerned with the negative externalities associated with business, and the collateral damage imposed on secondary groups. In her view, the two both reject the idea that either “human suffering or environmental degradation are the unavoidable price to be paid for economic growth”.95 A coherent labour and environmental politics would recognise that struggles for “occupational, environmental and public health are interlinked aspects of the same problem - that of the social costs of production in the capitalistic system”.96

The archetypal Australian example of this shared logic was the ‘green ban’ movement of the early 1970s. Introduced by the Builders Labours Federation (BLF), this campaign directed industrial power towards environmental ends. For four years, the union’s New South Wales branch, led by secretary Jack Mundey, boycotted development projects deemed either ecologically or socially destructive.97 The bans targeted natural degradation, as well as threats to working class urban communities; seeking to halt both inner city gentrification and environmental damage. Though a staunchly left wing union, the BLF built relationships with local residents groups, often representing middle class interests historically uncomfortable with the union’s confrontational politics.98 But as Barca predicted, the union shared the conservationist desire to challenge “property capital, as an urgent action for the social good and in defence of the environment”.99 The union’s leaders openly articulated this principle, claiming a broader mission than immediate economic interests. As Jack Mundey expressed it, “the workers should be concerned about every aspect of life - not just their

96 Ibid, p.63.
working conditions”. Though subject to criticism within the broader labour movement, Mundey defended the model:

“Some were rather blunt: “why should we save the bushland for these middle class shits?” Others said, “Well, almost certainly we haven't got any builders’ labourers living in Hunters Hill. Why should it be our concern?” Others again took a broader view: “If we're going to fight for better conditions, including where our members live, we've got to be consistent.” I summed up the discussion by saying what was the use of winning higher wages and better conditions if we lived in cities devoid of parks and denuded of trees?”

As Mundey made clear, the green bans were premised on a certain idea of unionism, one with a wider remit than just pay and conditions. In the academic literature, this attitude resembled what scholars call ‘social unionism’. Distinct from a narrower ‘business unionism’ - which “accepted the terrain of capitalism and worked to improve the material lot of particular sections of the working class within that political and economic framework” - this model promoted an “anti-economic analysis of workers problems and an anti-sectionalist definition of workers interests and identities”. As union members possessed interests and identities beyond their wage earning status, social unionism considered broader community interests when making political demands.

Social unionism represented one attempt by activists and scholars to bridge the divide between labour and the environment. A second, prominent during the recent global financial crisis, was the push for a ‘green new deal’. This was the idea that governments could link economic stimulus, industry policy and green concerns; “reviving the global economy and boosting employment, while simultaneously accelerating the fight against climate change, environmental

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degradation and poverty”. In this view, the two concerns could actually be mutually reinforcing. Government could fund ecological modernisation, while also providing secure, well paid jobs, “combining the best of both worlds”. A third, related concept was that of a ‘just transition’. While accepting the need for gradual economic adjustment, particularly around climate change, many unionists emphasised the importance of “smoothing the shift towards a more sustainable society”. In this view, rather than changing abruptly and recklessly, policy should prioritise the social and economic needs of workers, particularly those employed in sectors burdened by stricter environmental regulation.

While these ideas exist within parts of the labour movement, their implementation is still a struggle for many unions. When faced with a perceived choice between industrial viability and environmentalism, certain organisations, even those who pioneered the social model, often decide that green concerns are less of a priority than members’ jobs. While some unions remain committed, this tension remains, requiring constant negotiation for any relationship to succeed. The strain between the interests of labour and the demands of environmentalists represents a third potential framework for understanding Labor and Greens relations. When confronted with environmental issues, it is possible that the two parties could be driven by competing impulses, particularly when regulation threatens employment. While Labor politicians might not be hostile to environmentalism - with the party and affiliated unions both engaging with it to various degrees - they could still feel more conflicted than Greens colleagues. Like the other two frameworks, Labor might seek to balance and moderate the interests of labour and the environment, while the Greens might present a less conflicted, more unapologetically conservationist position.

Conclusion

Each of these three frameworks hints at a structural dynamic that could plausibly influence the Labor and Greens relationship. Individually, they offer stylised oppositions, explaining some, but not all of their interactions. They also overlap to various extents. A party committed to ‘catch all’ politics is also likely to approach environmental issues by balancing social interests, attempting to simultaneously satisfy conservationists and organised labour. A party originating within the post material left, with its support for cultural liberalism, is also more likely to prioritise green concerns than a party originating in the old, material left. As explanations, they are not always competing.

Acknowledging this, the three points still offer useful frameworks for understanding the Labor and Greens relationship in Australia. They were present in the interviews – often mentioned by politicians without prompting – and help structure the thesis’s substantive chapters. The three frameworks suggest that: the two parties could take different stances cultural politics and post materialism, with Labor more conflicted than a consistently supportive Greens; that the two parties could approach politics in fundamentally different ways, with Labor pursuing an electoralist model of interest aggregation, and the Greens promoting movement politics and its elevation of principle; and that the environmentalist could strain the relationship, with Labour tied to the interests of trade unions, and the Greens advocating stronger natural protections.
CHAPTER THREE
Elite perspectives on the relationship

The research’s most significant empirical insight into the relationship comes from a series of interviews with party elites. Interviews in the social sciences can serve a number of useful functions. In the broadest sense, they allow researchers to “enter into another person’s perspective … beginning with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit”. Elite interviews give investigators “a unique opportunity to understand the worldview of those who wield a significant influence in society” - a world often closed to outsiders. They also provide information about moments and decisions made beyond the public gaze. Especially within complex institutions like political parties, they tell us about the “inner workings of the political process, the machinations between influential actors, and how a sequence of events was viewed and responded to within the political machine”.

These “unique opportunities” do, however, come with certain difficulties. The first is gaining access. Political elites are busy people, with limited and rationed time. They erect barriers between themselves and society, employing gatekeepers to assure control over their schedule and image. While a number of these issues arose during the interview process - offices not returning emails or calls, offices promising interviews and then later reneging, offices delaying scheduled interviews for more pressing matters - the project gained relatively good access to Labor and the Greens. Both institutions were generous and open, supplying party leaders, former cabinet ministers, and prominent members of parliament. While not every enquiry succeeded, most eventually led to an interview, with a bit of polite persistence. In total, forty one were conducted - twenty three with Labor figures, fifteen with Greens figures, and three with people from surrounding institutions. While the bulk of these were federal politicians, the

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interviews included state Greens representatives, as well as political advisors, to supplements the views of the minor party’s comparatively small caucus. Most were conducted in person, lasting thirty minutes to an hour, but six were via phone, due to timing and scheduling issues.

Table one: interview subjects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Labor</th>
<th>Greens</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anthony Albanese (Member for Grayndler)</td>
<td>Adam Bandt (Member for Melbourne)</td>
<td>Rachel Siewert (Senator for WA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Bowen (Member for McMahon)</td>
<td>Greg Barber (Victorian MLC)</td>
<td>Indra Esguerra (advisor to Shane Rattenbury)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gai Brodtmann (Member for Canberra)</td>
<td>Penny Wong (Senator for SA)</td>
<td>Tim Hollo (advisor to Milne)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna Burke (Member for Chisholm)</td>
<td>Sarah Hanson Young (Senator for SA)</td>
<td>John Hawkins (advisor to Milne + Brown)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony Burke (Member for Watson)</td>
<td>Scott Ludlam (Senator for WA)</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cath Bowtell (Candidate for Melbourne)</td>
<td>Christine Milne (Senator for Tasmania)</td>
<td>Ged Kearney (President of the ACTU)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob Carr (Senator for NSW)</td>
<td>Wayne Swan (Senator for Tasmania)</td>
<td>Richard Denniss (former advisor to Bob Brown/ Australian Institute economist)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg Combet (Member for Charlton)</td>
<td>Kelvin Thomson (Member for Wills)</td>
<td>Dennis Glover (Labor speechwriter)</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Faulkner (Senator for NSW)</td>
<td>Tim Watts (Member for Gellibrand)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurie Ferguson (Member for Werriwa)</td>
<td>Penny Wong (Senator for SA)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Giles (Member for Scullin)</td>
<td>Allen Behm (advisor to Combet)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Critics of elite interviews in the social sciences raise another, more substantive problem with this kind of evidence: how can we trust anything these people say? Political elites possess their own goals and interests, not always motivated by scholarly accuracy. They “present themselves in a good light … conveying a particular version of events, to get arguments and points of view across, to deride or displace other interpretations and points of view”. With extensive media training, they can deliberately or inadvertently avoid questions asked of them.  

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This creates an obvious problem for researchers using interviews to verify empirical ‘facts’. Partly because of this dilemma, the thesis used the interviews for a different purpose. Rather than establishing facts, or confirming timelines, the objective was “to come away from the interview understanding as much as possible about the views of the interview subjects”.\textsuperscript{7} As a group of people with direct influence over the relationship, building it in public and parliament, the research was interested in each party’s institutional perspective: “how does he/she think about this? Why does he/she think this way?”\textsuperscript{8} The interviews were not designed as interrogations, but as prompts for politicians to articulate their attitudes and perspectives.

These concerns shaped the kind of questions the interviews asked. The questions tended to be both open ended, allowing space for individuals to expand on their views and experiences, as well as semi structured, combining both uniform and more targeted questions. The thesis pursued this strategy for two reasons. Firstly, elite subjects tend to resist the “straitjacket” of closed questions, instead “preferring to articulate their views, explaining why they think what they think”. Secondly, open questions allow for depth and nuance, “probing beneath the surface of a response to the reasoning and premises that underlie it”.\textsuperscript{9} Chapters three, four and eight all began with open questions, asked across all the interviews (why did you choose Labor over an alternative like the Greens?; was the formal Agreement a successful model for minority government?; how would you like the relationship to function in the future?). Chapters five, six and seven tailored questions to specific figures, with more specific political experiences. With each focussing on a difficult policy area - climate legislation, refugee processing and resources taxation - the thesis interviewed relevant Labor Ministers and Greens spokespeople wherever possible. Across the three chapters, this was largely achieved.

As Weiss notes, “there are two distinct categories of potential respondents” in interview and survey research. There are “people who are uniquely able to be informative because they are expert in an area or were a privileged witness to an event; and people who, taken together, display what happens within a population affected by a situation or event”. The project chose individuals based on the first principle, focusing on active and recent members of parliament. Their views were interesting not just as a sample of a broader population, but as attitudes which themselves influence political outcomes. These figures witness developments in the relationship, but they also actively shape them. That said, the interviews did attempt to capture as wide a sample of perspectives as it could, balancing the interviews along gender, age and factional lines where relevant. While this was largely achieved, the final sample inevitably depended on which individuals agreed to the request, and which did not.

‘Saying interesting things’ or ‘changing the world’: Labor on the Greens

In each interview with Labor politicians, the MP was first asked a foundational question about their political commitment, “why did you choose the Labor Party over an alternative like the Greens?” Some like Wayne Swan scoffed at the question, considering the counterfactual unthinkable. Others were more reflective, particularly the younger Members of Parliament, suggesting their political path involved a more active choice. The purpose of these discussions was to explore ALP perspectives on the relationship, with Labor politicians identifying the differences between the parties they considered personally significant. While each MP relayed their own story, there were a number of trends in the answers. Four responses in particular were common: the difference between a major and minor party; Labor’s distinctive history and institutional affiliation with the union movement; the perceived conflict between economic

11 The interviews included 21 men and 20 women; 21 below and 20 above the age of 50; within Labor, 13 from the left faction, 9 from the right faction and one unaligned member. The sample did, however, gravitate around Victoria and New South Wales representatives, with comparatively few conducted with Queensland and South Australia figures.
12 The thesis uses ‘MPs’ as shorthand for ‘Members of Parliament’ - elected officials in both the House or Representatives and Senate.
growth and environmentalism; and a rejection of any substantive difference between Labor and the Greens. While both were expressed, institutional or procedural points were far more prominent than programmatic or ideological ones.

Across the interviews, the first and most common Labor response invoked the difference between major and minor party politics. In the minds of a substantial number of Labor MPs, politics without access to executive power was incomplete, an inefficient and even self indulgent use of time and resources. Without a proven path to government, they saw the Greens as more of a protest movement than serious political party. As Andrew Leigh put it, the decision to quit his job as an economics professor and enter parliament was only worthwhile if it came with the chance to actively shape policy:

“I always wanted to be involved in a party of government, a party that could and has in the past produced a Prime Minister. My sense was that, particularly as someone who was formerly an academic, my choice to move from academia to politics was a desire to move from the world of putting ideas out there to a world of getting ideas implemented. And in some sense being part of the Greens is closer to being an academic than being in politics - you get to say lots of interesting things, but very rarely do you get to change the world.”

For Leigh and other Labor MPs, the distinction between commentary and direct political influence was an important one. They challenged critics of the office seeking party, rejecting the claim that a focus on government represented a hunger for power and the personal spoils associated with it. In fact, they claimed that the opposite was true - that the real weakness in left politics was its tendency towards comfortable dissent, being content to advocate ideals instead of seeking the power necessary to achieve them. According to Tanya Plibersek, this was the defining difference between the two parties. While progressives might possess “the noblest objectives”, without government they were very difficult to secure:

13 Leigh, Andrew, (11th of March, 2016), personal interview.
"Really, I'm in the Labor Party because it reflects my values ... but it also reflects the importance I place on actual achievement - not just talking about what you want to see changed. And I'd rather struggle and get done half of what I want, then sit back and say 'it's all terrible' and achieve nothing".14

As others admitted, this did not necessarily require an enormous difference in substantive principles. The bigger difference was each party’s capacity and desire to implement its values. “Saying the right things” might feel nice, even therapeutic, but it meant little unless those ideas materialised as legislation.15 This was a central theme, especially among Labor MPs who had publicly opposed their own party on contentious policies. It was how Anna Burke, a critic of Labor’s refugee stance, rebutted questions about political affiliation:

“Nowdays a lot of people have said to me “why don’t you leave and go join the Greens”? Well, because I want to be a party of government, I want to be a party that controls the Treasury benches, I don’t want to be a party of opposition, I don’t want to be a party of dissent - I actually want to be a party that can have a place at the table.”16

These arguments for Labor were premised on the practical benefits of government, the legislative and bureaucratic opportunities not available to minor parties. But other Labor MPs emphasised another side of major party politics: its democratic legitimacy. These figures defended Diamond and Gunther’s electoralist model of party politics. They argued that, by “aggregating as wide a variety of social interests as possible”, Labor was a more diverse and nationally representative institution than minor party challengers. Gai Brodtmann presented this bluntly, asserting a disconnect between “fringe” concerns and the majority of the electorate:

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14 Plibersek, Tanya, (2nd of March, 2016), personal interview.
Plibersek, Tanya, (2016), ‘The progressive case for Labor’, speech to the Mckell Institute, 18th of June 2016, [online] https://medium.com/labor-herald/the-progressive-case-for-labor-tanya-plibersek-6285ebc2078f#.t0xzv9rg0
15 O’Neil, Clare, (16th of March, 2016), personal interview.
16 Burke, Anna, (11th of April, 2016), personal interview.
“I do believe that we’re the only other alternative government and that what we stand for is what working and middle class families are after … and I don’t believe that the Greens stand for that. They stand for a fringe. It’s a particular fringe of the community, and there’s definitely a group there that shares their beliefs, but they don’t represent the views of the broader Australian community”.\textsuperscript{17}

Labor MPs were conscious that, as members of a party committed to majoritarianism, they needed to win the support of multiple constituencies, often with different concerns and priorities. This meant the party’s platform also needed to balance different demands; the material and the post material, the moderate and the strident. According to Jenny McAllister, this was the unavoidable reality of democratic politics, and a task worth embracing:

“I believe very much that, as a progressive, you’ve got an obligation to practically enact the things you believe in, however imperfectly. My beliefs about the virtues of compromise, and the kind of glorious imperfections of democratic processes have probably intensified the longer I’ve been involved in politics … But I think, by pursuing majority support within the Australian community, the Labor Party takes on the obligation of trying to integrate the interests and demands and aspirations of the majority. That’s a much more complex task than representing a small minority. And I believe it has an inherent moral value in a democratic society - when you’re trying to knit together a coalition capable of building a better community.”\textsuperscript{18}

Others were more explicit about post material and material dynamic. Andrew Giles described the Labor Party as a “bridge” between social progressives and those on the economic periphery.\textsuperscript{19} As McAllister noted, this could be a “complex task”. While Labor needed the support of both to win elections, their views did not always align. Giles cited refugee processing as one such difficult area, where economic anxiety could discourage progressive social attitudes.

\textsuperscript{17} Brodtmann, Gai, (21st of March, 2016), personal interview.
\textsuperscript{18} McAllister, Jenny, (11th of October, 2016), personal interview.
\textsuperscript{19} Giles, Andrew, (16th of February, 2016), personal interview.
Emphasising one group risked marginalising the other, whose demands were both socially pressing and politically significant:

“T’m not only a progressive social democrat and someone who firmly believes in the power of government. I believe in a political party that is committed to representing a broad mass of Australian people … My main concern is maintaining political structures that offer people with limited economic and social capital a chance at shaping their circumstances and their lives. We have to maintain political bridges between their concerns and the concerns of others that may be animated by more post material concerns - contra to the Greens, who clearly have a post material constituency”.

The second common difference cited by Labor MPs involved the party’s institutional history - both its traditional relationship with trade unions, and its own achievements while in government. Just under half the Labor MPs interviewed had some professional history in trade unions, with many of them drawing a link between it and their political commitments. A number saw this affiliation as a fundamental difference between Labor and the Greens, with significant implications about their respective politics. In Wayne Swan’s view, it meant the two were designed to represent different people:

“Why am I member of the Labor Party and not the Greens? Because the Greens aren’t the Labor Party. And we don’t actually share a lot in common when it comes to what I regard as the key tenets of social democracy or democratic socialism. I don’t see the Greens as being an alternative to the Labor Party at all … we are social democratic Labor Party that has at its very core the notion of working people and the organisations that represent them, trade unions”.

In Anthony Albanese’s experience, joining Labor was the obvious extension of working class life and its social institutions. Growing up in inner-city Sydney, the party’s history, connection to trade unions, and roots in the community

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20 Ibid.
21 Swan, Wayne, (10th of February, 2016), personal interview.
produced an instinctive sense of loyalty. While more radical left parties existed, many precursors to the New South Wales Greens, they lacked these associations, as well as the ability to influence policy:

"In terms of my background, my mother was in the Labor Party, my grandfather was in the Labor Party. I saw the Labor Party as the vehicle for change as a working class based party, and the Liberal Party as the ruling class based party. I saw it pretty simply ... It was a natural thing to join the Labor Party."\(^{22}\)

Labor figures framed this tie as something larger than just institutional affiliation, claiming it reflected a deeper attitude to organisation and social change. A term many returned to was “collective”. Anna Burke stated that her Labor commitment was also driven by her “belief in the collective … united we stand, divided we fall”.\(^{23}\) Sue Lines, a former Western Australian Secretary of the United Voice trade union, argued that, even if it was not clear to outside observers, the labour movement’s concept of ‘solidarity’ permeated the party’s culture in unique ways:

“Labor’s got a history and a culture that I’m not sure is visible from the outside. We’re collective, despite our differences. There is a collectiveness about Labor that doesn’t exist in the Greens … I’ll give you an example. We might have lines of the day (which we don’t get access to as backbenchers) but even without them, we will be on message because that’s who we are ... When I look at the Greens, I see a collection of individuals, they don’t have that same common set of values that bind them together.”\(^{24}\)

Cath Bowtell made a similar point about her personal history and political instincts. In her experience, Labor’s trade union connection instilled collectivist values not present in Green politics, prioritising group discipline over the right to personal expression and dissent:

\(^{22}\) Albanese, Anthony, (9th of November, 2016), personal interview.
\(^{23}\) Burke, Anna, (11th of April, 2016), personal interview.
\(^{24}\) Lines, Sue, (16th of March, 2016), personal interview.
“My involvement in the party came through the industrial wing, so the Greens weren’t even on my radar in terms of an option to join. Having said that, I wouldn’t have anyway [joined the Greens], because having understood what I understand about them now, I don’t think they’re a collectivist party and I don’t think they’re a solidarity party - and when you come out of the labour movement, I think that’s really important, that capacity to have your arguments, make your decision and then be bound.”

If Labor’s traditional relationship with the union movement inspired MPs to participate in the party, so too did its own institutional history. Many Labor figures considered the party’s earlier achievements both proof of Labor’s effectiveness as a political force, and personal motivation for them to join. The most vivid of these tended to be from their youth, and the prominent political figures as they were becoming politically conscious. Lisa Singh, for instance, talked of her experience under the Keating government:

“I was very taken as a young person by Paul Keating when he was Prime Minister - he inspired me to join the Labor Party, mainly because of the social justice values that he held. I was involved in women’s issues as a younger person, and his approach to women’s engagement in work, addressing inequalities for women, particularly migrant women, really inspired me. On top of that, it was his very outward looking approach to Australia, engaging with the Asian region, becoming a Republic, changing the flag, his approach to Indigenous Australians ... it was his leadership that I thought was bringing Labor into the modern world.”

Singh, a Tasmanian, also met former Greens leader Bob Brown at university. While she admired him, she saw his politics as less effective than Keating’s, returning again to the power of major parties:

“I met Bob Brown as a young person as well and was also taken by him - and did consider what it would be like to join the Greens - but to me the Greens were too much of a narrow focused party that didn’t want to

25 Bowtell, Cath, (13th of April, 2016), personal interview.
26 Singh, Lisa, (20th of April, 2016), personal interview.
broaden out into a party that wanted to govern for a country. They were, to me, more of a protest party than a governing party. So when I decided to finally run for Parliament, it was about wanting to make a difference and that to me was being part of a government.”27

Another regularly cited catalyst for Labor affiliation was Gough Whitlam. Melissa Parkes was “inspired” by his leadership and the “social, cultural and legal changes that were made in a short space of time to radically change the country”.28 Kelvin Thomson recalled being a “fan of Gough Whitlam, who was the dominant political figure during the time I was at university and got involved in politics”.29 As an older and more electorally successful party, these institutional and historical legacies were more prominent in the minds of Labor MPs than Greens figures - with many viewing them as evidence that Labor was the central actor in progressive Australian political history.

The third reason stated by Labor MPs was different to the first two, emphasising programmatic over procedural or institutional conflict. These responses pointed to ideological distinctions between the parties, rather than a broader approach to politics. They were also less common than the first two. The most prominent of these, presented by Chris Bowen and Greg Combet, identified a clash between economic and environmental ideologies. According to Bowen, the Greens did not support Labor’s implicit commitment to economic growth, making them a “very different party”:

“Labor has always at its core believed in economic growth, it’s always thought that economic growth lifts people out of poverty and that we have to be generators of economic growth. The Greens at their core don’t believe in economic growth - that’s the essential difference. Many of them would see the world having reached the end of its finite resources, or that economic growth is just depleting resources. You see this argument in the debates about GDP, sometimes you see it in peak oil debates … but undercurrent to their policy is that they don’t really care about economic

27 Ibid.
28 Parke, Melissa, (22nd of March, 2016), personal interview.
29 Thomson, Kelvin, (14th of April, 2016), personal interview.
growth. And that’s why fundamentally I think we’re not light and dark on the same spectrum - we’re fundamentally different.”

Bowen linked this ambivalence to the party’s voter base. Educated and economically secure citizens might not depend on the momentum of economic growth, but those with “limited economic and social capital” did:

“The Greens base is essentially professional, relatively well paid, highly educated, so they don’t need economic growth to get by, they do OK. If you’re a professional living in the inner cities, you’re pretty much set. The people that need economic growth are in the suburbs, low paid, trying to get ahead, migrant communities, people at risk of marginalisation, people at risk of unemployment - they’re the ones that need economic growth.”

Greg Combet made a similar point. Discussing his time as Minister for Climate Change, he relayed instances where, if the government had accepted the Greens’ strongest environmental case, Labor would have subordinated working class interests. This placed the Greens at odds with his own belief in “placing economic growth and the [subsequent] distribution of wealth at the centre of our program”:

“I think that’s the bit where there’s a significant difference with the Greens. Because they emphasise the environment above all else, that brings them into conflict with Labor’s values about the economy, the distribution of wealth and jobs, from time to time. A practical example of that is ‘shut down the coal industry’. That’s their policy. The problem with that from a Labor standpoint is that, while recognising the environment argument, it would put tens of thousands of people out of job, who are working class people and who would be severely disadvantaged.”

In both these readings, Greens politics was not just a more aggressive or naive form of Labor politics, nor were the two parties just separated by political strategy. Both argued that Labor’s political program - founded by organised

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30 Bowen, Chris, (9th of December, 2015), personal interview.
31 Ibid.
32 Combet, Greg, (2nd of May, 2016), personal interview.
labour, built to support working class interests, and committed above all to raising material living standards - differed in essence from an agenda prioritising the environment.

Other Labor comments, however, complicated this story. While not raised as frequently as the trade union connection, a smaller group of MPs cited environmentalism as their original reason for joining the Labor Party. Tony Burke described forestry protection as his first political passion:

“I became politically active for the environment. The Greens didn’t exist at the time and, even if they did, I wouldn’t have joined them. But for me the issue that I was particularly passionate about when I joined the Labor Party was the saving of the Daintree Rainforest, and it was Labor that was doing the saving. So it was very straightforward for me - the party that was delivering the things that I was passionate about was Labor … the conservation is there and always has been since Whitlam.”

These responses were not, however, identical to Greens stories of environmental awakening. They were usually coloured with a level of political pragmatism not present in their minor party equivalents. Kelvin Thomson recounted a childhood fascination with the natural world, combined with political calculation about where best to direct his energies:

“I got interested in Australian birds and plants and animals when I was a kid, and from there I got interested in conservation and environment issues, and from there I got interested in politics - because you realise it’s governments, for better or worse, that make the decisions that determine these things. I joined the Labor Party because I thought it was the best bet in relation to the environment. You didn’t always win, but you won more than you lost - and I thought with the Liberals that you very seldom won.”

33 Burke, Tony, (10th of February, 2016), personal interview.
34 Thomson, Kelvin, (14th of April, 2016), personal interview.
While Bowen’s argument was different to Thompson’s, with different concerns and goals, there was still crossover between the two. Bowen identified himself as an environmentalist, concerned about halting climate change, while Thompson considered the Greens excessively “utopian”. What the two perspectives did highlight was a persistent tension within the Labor Party, one acknowledged by both Burke and Thompson - that a party built by trade unionism, committed historically to Australia’s industrial success, carries a complex relationship with environmental protection.

The final group of responses were altogether different to the first three. Unlike most Labor figures, this small minority of MPs did not identify any great difference between themselves and the Greens. They generally saw the boundaries between Labor and the Greens as porous, with themselves positioned somewhere along it. Laurie Ferguson, an MP since 1990, considered stark partisan lines more a product of Australia’s strict system of party discipline than anything principled:

“...I joined the Labor Party in 1967, when I was 15 years old. I’m a Member of Parliament - rarely do people in Australian politics leave one party and join another. Australia has a very strong tradition of partisan discipline, unlike the United States or Britain. So that’s the starting point … it’s probably to some degree fate”.  

For those identifying at the boundary, this theme of fate, of personal path dependence, was common. As Melissa Parke told her story, the choice to join Labor was as much the party’s as it was hers:

“When I was working as a community legal centre lawyer in Bunbury in the mid 1990s, I was involved in local social justice issues and environmental issues, and was approached by the Labor Party to stand as their candidate in a marginal seat in the 1996 state election. And as I was that way inclined in any event, I said why not … I lost that election and then went on with my life, including going off to work for the United Nations, and didn’t think about politics again until I was contacted by

35 Ferguson, Laurie, (14th of March, 2016), personal interview.
Carmen Lawrence when I was in Lebanon and asked if I would consider coming back to Australia to run for Fremantle. So I don’t know if I really chose the Labor Party or it chose me, because both times I was approached”. 36

Both Parkes and Ferguson saw a natural alignment between the Labor tradition and ideas promoted by the modern Greens. They generally considered partisan hostility motivated by electoral concerns, rather than by conflicting programmes. When asked about their respective values, Parkes did not see any serious difference:

“[When people claim that the Greens have different values to Labor] I don’t actually know if that is in any way true. They believe in fair and safe working conditions, better public transport, high quality public health and education, supporting the disadvantaged, affordable housing - these are also Greens policies. So what is it that the Greens believe in that Labor doesn’t? I don’t know.”

Ferguson agreed with Parkes, even pushing the point further. On a number of issues, he identified more with the Greens position than Labor’s:

“I philosophically feel close to the Greens on the majority of issues (the one I feel radically different on is detention policy and refugees - on that I feel very different to them, probably more different than most people in the left of the Labor Party). But on other issues I feel closer. On foreign policy, I aspire to a more independent neutralist position, I’m not as enamored with the US alliance. I’m a very strong environmentalist, on climate change. I believe in radical tax messages, alternative energy...” 37

This position represented a very small minority within the Labor caucus. Parkes and Ferguson also possessed characteristics that made them different to many of their colleagues. Both had publicly denounced Labor policies as parliamentarians and both were in their final months in office before retirement when interviewed - potentially lowering inhibitions associated with career

36 Parke, Melissa, (22nd of March, 2016), personal interview.
37 Ferguson, Laurie, (14th of March, 2016), personal interview.
advancement and cultural acceptance. It is possible that this is a wider held view than the interviews revealed, as most subjects were still involved in party politics.

Across the interviews, Labor MPs expressed a number of views on the Greens. They identified different personal motivations, with different reasons for choosing Labor over the minor party. There were, however, some important trends within the discussions. Labor MPs were much more likely to emphasise the party’s approach to politics than programmatic disagreements with the Greens. Contrasting themselves with the minor party, they saw themselves as the only organisation capable of turning progressive ideas into progressive legislation, evidenced by Labor’s history in government, relationship with institutions like organised labour, and appeal to diverse electorates. While some ideological conflict did arise, mainly involving a tension between environmentalism and industrial growth, it was less prominent and featured more internal division. What emerged from the interviews was less a clash of political beliefs, or a fundamental disagreement about policy and ideas, and more a dispute about the types of politics that could realistically advance them. As Andrew Leigh framed the situation, for many Labor MPs it was a choice between “saying interesting things” and “changing the world”.

*Just blowing with the wind*: the Greens on Labor

In each interview with Greens members, the opposite question was asked: “why did you choose the Greens over an alternative like the Labor Party?” As a younger organisation, born in the shadow of older parties, most Greens figures had relatively well formed positions on Labor. Some, like Adam Bandt, had even been a member. Others, like Lee Rhiannon and Jamie Parker, were asked to join but refused. The fact that Labor came first meant decisions to join the Greens were often made in response to the established political institution.

Most Greens answers involved some kind of disillusionment with the Labor Party. Some were related to specific historical moments, some were more conceptual. Four in particular were common: environmental disputes; economic
policy; questions of social justice; and the party’s underlying approach to politics. While Greens figures were more likely to cite policy disputes than Labor MPs, most were still filtered through the procedural disagreement. Across the interviews, Greens representatives rejected Labor’s brand of electoralism, arguing that it was too cautious, too concerned with appeasing voters and interest groups to provide progressive leadership.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the first and most prevalent Greens response involved the environment. If some Labor MPs identified a conflict between economic growth and an overly precautionary brand of environmentalism, then Greens politicians occupied the other side of this divide, often happily. Its representatives considered Labor’s attachment to industry a flaw, making it blind to lasting, sometimes catastrophic damage to the natural world. These figures joined the Greens in response to Labor’s environmental policy, considering the party conflicted, cynical or, at best, a reluctant partner. In Greg Barber’s eyes, this was because Labor’s materialism misunderstood the problems facing human society:

“They’re hopeless divided over the question of the environment … They believe that it’s a trade-off between material issues and environmental protection. They’re lying awake at night trying to think ‘how do we balance jobs and the environment’? But as long as you keep asking that question you’re never going to get an answer - because the environment is our life support system. We’re actually here, of it. There’s no balancing act.”

For many Greens MPs, this conflict first became apparent in campaigns around nature conservation. Janet Rice, now a federal Senator, helped found the Victorian Greens in the early 1990s. Her decision was local, driven by the dynamics of Victorian forestry policy at the time. But while the context was specific, Rice’s exasperation with what she considered environmental posturing was a common theme among Green figures. According to the Senator, Labor’s behaviour under Hawke and Richardson was characterised by duplicity:

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38 Barber, Greg, (11th of April, 2016), personal interview.
“The relationship between Labor and the Greens was absolutely central to my decision to throw myself into forming the Greens. I’d been working as a forest campaigner from 1983-1990, so lobbying at the state and federal level, both the Labor and Liberal parties. I was getting frustrated. From time to time with the Labor Party you’d get people who would give you policy commitments towards environmental protection, but then when it came to actually implementing those policies they’d sell you out completely.”

For Rice and other Victorian environmentalists, the relationship reached its lowest point in the years following the 1990 federal election. After campaigning to stop forestry in the East Gippsland region, Rice negotiated a settlement with Labor’s federal Minister for the Environment, Graham Richardson, offering to end the protest in exchange for a moratorium on local logging. But what she thought was a deal ended in disappointment, with Rice’s organisation feeling betrayed by the Minister:

“There was an agreement that was reached that the logging would stop, there’d be a process to determine whether there were ‘prudent and feasible’ alternatives to logging that forest. So we had a bit of to and fro as to what ‘prudent and feasible’ meant. Would it mean there would be the option of ‘not logging altogether’? Richardson assured me that, yes, the federal government’s viewpoint was that ‘prudent and feasible’ alternatives could mean getting out of those forests altogether, and that he had written a letter to the state governments [relaying the same point]. It turns out that letter was never sent … we’d been completely sold out”.

Other Greens echoed this indignation with the Labor government, particularly under Keating. Richard Di Natale described its environmental record as “poor”, as did Jamie Parker, who recalled protesting the party’s decisions at university. Tim Hollo, a student and environmental campaigner at the time, also felt that Keating was no ally of the movement:

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39 Rice, Janet, (11th of April, 2016), personal interview.  
40 Rice, Susan, (11th of April, 2016), personal interview.  
41 Di Natale, Richard, (20th of April, 2016), personal interview.  
Parker, Jamie, (24th of May, 2016), personal interview.
“While I very much did enjoy the Keating government from many perspectives, one of the things that stuck out for me at the time and more and more clearly with history is that Keating had no interest in the environment at all - less than no interest, he was quite antagonistic to environmentalism.”

Greg Barber emphasised a story which, in his view, conveyed Keating’s fundamental aversion to ‘green’ issues. After 1990 and its “big environmental election”, Barber could tell that Labor was “starting to work its way into the environment”, even if many activists considered the move opportunistic. But this all stopped when Keating took over from Hawke:

“At [Keating’s] 1992 Christmas party with his staff, he told them that the environment had had a pretty good go, but it was time to redress the balance - that the pendulum had swung too far back. So from Arthur Phillip through to 1990 we’d be destroying the bloody country, from 1990-1992 we did a few green things, but it was time to send the balance back the other way. So it was over, done, straight back to core material issues. And that’s what Labor do whenever they’re in a tight spot - they drop all those other issues and run back to mamma, back to home base.”

While these environmental critiques of Labor politics originated in conservation campaigns, other politicians, especially younger ones, cited climate change as their reason for becoming active in Greens politics. As Adam Bandt stated in an interview with The Australian after his election in 2010, global warming was his most potent political motivation:

“I’d always wanted to contribute in some way to the progressive side of politics … But digesting the climate-change science several years ago was a real tipping point. It was terrifying … This threw me on a trajectory towards the Greens and into electoral politics.”

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42 Hollo, Tim, (16th of May, 2016), personal interview.
43 Barber, Greg, (11th of April, 2016), personal interview.
Bandt himself had been a member of the Labor Party in the early 1990s, before leaving in opposition to the federal government’s economic agenda. He later joined the Greens, motivated by what he saw as major party resistance on climate change. He considered global warming pressing, potentially existential threat to humanity, and thought Labor lacked the requisite urgency to confront it:

“It was climate change that prompted me to join the Greens and then ultimately quit my job and then start running for politics. To turn around an old saying - if you’re not a socialist you don’t have a heart, but if you’re not worried about global warming you don’t have a head. It was seeing Labor treat global warming as an optional extra and only responding to it when pushed to.”

Ellen Sandell cited the same reason for running as a Greens candidate in Victorian parliament. A scientist, Sandell worked for the CSIRO, before joining the state bureaucracy as a climate policy officer in 2007. While initially excited about the role, Sandell became frustrated with John Brumby’s Labor government, doubting its genuine commitment to emissions reduction:

“I had a whole bunch of experiences there that made me realise that the Labor Party were giving into whatever the public wanted, just blowing with the wind, rather than having a principled stance and showing leadership. The department commissioned a report to determine how much Victorian coal companies would be affected by a federal carbon price. The report said that they’d be fine, they had diversified assets, and it wouldn’t be that big of a deal.

The government then asked them [the department] to change the report to say that the coal companies needed lots of compensation when they didn’t really - the government told them to do that and they did. So it just felt like when Labor was in government they weren’t showing any leadership. Even though John Brumby would say he did some good things about climate change, but actually when the rubber hit the road and he

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45 Bandt, Adam, (15th of March, 2016), personal interview.
had to make decisions about coal or native forests, my experience was they cared more about getting re-elected than the future or about climate change.”

While the Greens agenda certainly grew beyond the confines of ecological politics, as Kitschelt suggested it must to succeed, environmentalism was still the most common reason given by politicians for joining the party. Every representative mentioned it, though some gave it greater emphasis than others. Across the Greens, a strong consensus emerged. Its politicians believed that, without external pressure, Labor was too conflicted to ever truly support environmental protection, and that it was their role to provide that impetus.

The second theme of the interviews was often implicit within these environmental discussions. Like Kirchheimer’s classic rebuttal of catch all parties, Greens figures critiqued Labor’s approach to politics, portraying it as pragmatic to the point of being unprincipled. These Greens representatives frequently cited “values”, considering their expression to be a primary, almost inviolable political duty. In Jamie Parker’s words, life was “too short” to compromise on political beliefs:

“I want to align my life with my values, I don’t want to spend 30-40 years of my life trying to turn an organisation to support a particular political view - I want to join an organisation that already reflects my view. So from my perspective, people that dedicate their lives to changing the position of a party - for me, life’s too short … I think people that commit themselves to an organisation to support things they don’t believe in for some greater good down the track, it’s just not realistic.”

Personal values were a popular starting point for Greens politicians. Shane Rattenbury stated that, until he heard about the Greens, “it hadn’t occurred to

46 Sandell, Ellen, (11th of April, 2016), personal interview.
49 Parker, Jamie, (24th of May, 2016), personal interview.
“[him]” to join a political party - no other group had fully embodied his values.\textsuperscript{50} As a result, Greens MPs were generally wary of politicians who compromised on their ideals, or viewed them as a starting point for political negotiation. When Labor MPs talked about representing a “bridge” between different social blocs, or transcending a particular “fringe” of the community, Greens MPs perceived a potentially corrosive electoral calculation. This underpinned Ellen Sandell’s problem with Labor’s climate policy in Victoria - that it was “giving in to what the public wanted, just blowing with the wind, rather than having a principled stance and showing leadership.”\textsuperscript{51}

In Lee Rhiannon’s eyes, Sandell’s experience was the classic story of Labor politics. A long-time activist and one-time member of the Socialist Party of Australia, she was once asked to join Labor, but “never thought about” signing up. From the epochal political struggles of her political youth in the 1960s, Rhiannon believed that Labor only ever acted when pushed by external social forces:

“I always grew up thinking that the Liberals and Nationals were worse than Labor, but Labor was still a party you needed to protest to get them to do anything. You know, growing up in the ‘60s, they dragged the chain on the Vietnam War. It’s true that Gough Whitlam brought the troops home in 1975, but it was really the protests that pushed them to do it.”\textsuperscript{52}

For Rhiannon, the Greens were appealing precisely because of their connection to the kinds of social movements that influenced Labor. It was a party “about social change, in terms of how society works”, and it was a party that members could “actually be involved with”.\textsuperscript{53} This was a common sentiment among Greens MPs, representing a second side of its procedural argument for the party. Greens figures claimed that, unlike Labor, the party gave its membership a tangible influence over policy. Rachel Siewert cited this as a reason for avoiding Labor membership and choosing the Greens. “I knew how [Labor] made their

\textsuperscript{50} Rattenbury, Shane, (2nd of June 2016), personal interview.
\textsuperscript{51} Sandell, Ellen, (11th of April, 2016), personal interview.
\textsuperscript{52} Rhiannon, Lee, (16th of March, 2016), personal interview.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
decisions, people didn't get their own votes, the grassroots didn't get to influence policy”, she observed. “The way decisions were made, you as an individual got little opportunity to influence them or comment on policy”.\(^{54}\) In Jamie Parker’s eyes, this was because Labor was deliberately designed to silence grassroots voices:

“[When I joined] the Greens were more active on the ground and in the community … I was President of the National Union of Students in New South Wales [in the 1990s] and I was approached by a Labor person that I knew quite well and he said “Jamie, you should join Labor. We’re a great party, we’ve got a great history … but you have to join the right [faction of the Labor Party]”. And I asked “why do you have to join the right?”. He said “look, we’ve gerrymandered the party so that the left can never win. So what you need to do is join the right and then you’ll be able to get a spot in the future - if you stay loyal and commit to the party, you’ll go far.”\(^{55}\)

Parker stated that he was “horrified” by the incident, turning him off Labor politics. This was driven by a deeper belief, that “the decisions an organisation makes are a function of its processes”:

“I didn’t like [the Labor] way. And if you look at what was happening in student politics at the time, there was a lot more of push away from the kind of centralised, binding caucus approach of the major parties, and to a more independent minded, less disciplined, slavishly-supporting the leader kind of approach.”\(^{56}\)

While these arguments blended a few different critiques - of Labor’s appeasement of powerful interest groups, its lack of internal democracy, and its demands on personal political morality - they all embodied a rejection of Labor’s approach to politics. Like Diamond and Gunther’s movement party, Green MPs

\(^{54}\) Seiwert, Rachel, (12th of September, 2016), personal interview.
\(^{55}\) Parker, Jamie, (24th of May, 2016), personal interview.
\(^{56}\) Ibid.
stressed policy articulation over the “logic of electoral competition”, and were repelled by parties that did the opposite.\textsuperscript{57}

The third and fourth reasons cited by Greens figures involved economic and social disagreements with Labor. These were present in the interviews, but less prominent than the environmental or procedural critiques. On economic policy, some Greens expressed disillusionment with what they saw as Labor’s surrender to ‘neoliberalism’, the orthodoxy of free market economics. They argued that, beginning with Hawke and Keating, the party was increasingly uncritical towards capitalism, and increasingly ambivalent about the role of government within it. In Tim Hollo’s eyes, this reflected a broader trend in centre-left politics:

“Labor and social democratic parties through the 1980s and 1990s basically bought into the neoliberal hegemony - if I can use very theoretical terminology. The Australian Labor Party has done that to an extraordinary degree. They basically see their role as tempering the excesses of neoliberalism capitalism.”\textsuperscript{58}

According to Hollo, Labor adopted this stance because it became “terrified” of organised capital, to the point where it would rather concede its case than risk its wrath. This reflected a relatively orthodox left critique of social democratic politics, especially in the context of scholarship emphasising the supposedly post material nature of green parties. Rather than ignoring material issues, certain Greens politicians lamented what they saw as Labor’s lost antagonism towards capitalism. This was Adam Bandt’s original motivation for leaving the party:

“I left Labor because its actions in government at the time were bringing about changes to education, higher education in particular, that struck me as ones that would just ultimately saddle students with enormous debts. It was the expansions of HECS, about converting other assistance to loans, all of which in a very short period of time has turned education into a debt factory for many students. It was the involvement in campaigns against a Labor government doing things I thought more appropriate for a Liberal

\textsuperscript{58} Hollo, Tim, (16th of May, 2016), personal interview.
government meant that I left the Labor Party … The Labor Party’s adoption of neoliberalism was pretty stark and it was the period in the 1990s, watching Labor in government, and seeing that they were prepared to implement the neoliberal agenda”.

Richard Di Natale also expressed reservations about the era’s economic policy, though his were more mixed than Bandt’s. While conceding that Labor’s liberal reforms created “a lot benefits”, Di Natale thought they also produced serious impacts on working class families similar to his own - and that Labor did too little to cushion their “dislocation”. Despite one being ostensibly material and the other ostensibly post material, these economic arguments possessed certain parallels with the party’s environmental positions. In both cases, Greens MPs claimed that Labor was now too reluctant to regulate private economic behaviour, too hesitant to challenge the interests of business to achieve progressive goals.

The final group of answers involved ‘social’ issues. These featured the kinds of post material policies described by Inglehart and other political scientists; the “non-economic, qualitative, reformist and lifestyle concerns, the issues of the new politics”.

Greens politicians liked to use the term “social justice” when referring to them. The most prominent of these involved rights of refugees and asylum seekers. Back to the Keating government’s decision to introduce mandatory detention in 1992, Greens figures recalled opposing Labor’s refugee trajectory - a movement, in their view, driven by the party’s electoral concerns. Di Natale cited it as another reason why he became disenchanted with the Keating government, and Tim Hollo remembered protesting against the reforms while at university. Moving forward a decade, Janet Rice described 2001 as another pivotal disappointment for her and other activists. In the political fallout from the MV Tampa’s arrival, “when Kim Beasley supported John Howard’s

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59 Bandt, Adam, (15th of March, 2016), personal interview.
60 Di Natale, Richard, (20th of April, 2016), personal interview.
62 Di Natale, Richard, (20th of April, 2016), personal interview.
Hollo, Tim, (16th of May, 2016), personal interview.
position”, she observed former Labor supporters leaving and joining the Greens:

“That was when there was a huge upswing and surge in Greens membership - of people who said, nope, they couldn’t to support a Labor Party that was going to do that … There’s a whole cohort of Greens members who call themselves ‘Tampa Greens’”.

Sarah Hanson Young was one of these disappointed “Tampa Greens”. At university in Adelaide in 2001, Hanson Young later became a refugee activist and campaigner, before entering the Senate as a 25 year old in 2007:

“I joined the Greens over the issues of refugee policy, primarily. It was seeing the weak response of the Labor Party, and Kim Beazley in particular, to the Tampa. At that time I was a university student, I was progressive but I wasn’t aligned to any party, and I saw Bob Brown as the only real voice standing up at the time.”

But while these social issues were mentioned sporadically, they were relatively rare among Greens responses, particularly given their usual public prominence. Only a handful cited them as a reason for choosing Greens over Labor. They were no more prevalent than economic critiques, and they were far less prevalent than environmental ones. Nor did Greens politicians invoke campaigns for marriage equality or feminism in their personal stories. This was noteworthy in the context of international scholarship on greens parties - much of which argues that their modern success is underpinned by this broad suite of policies, grouped together as a new political cleavage, rather than environmentalism in a narrow sense.

Across the interviews, it was clear that Greens political affiliation usually involved some form of conversation with Labor’s history and institutional direction. Jamie Parker and Richard Di Natale both acknowledged that, given

63 Rice, Janet, (11th of April, 2016), personal interview.
64 Hanson Young, Sarah, (10th of October, 2016), personal interview.
their working class backgrounds, they were classic targets for the major party -
and in another generation might have been supporters. At some point or
another, the majority of Greens politicians became either disappointed,
disillusioned or angry with Labor, and sought a more principled alternative. The
most common of these disagreements still involved environmental protection,
with almost every Greens figure mentioning it as a reason for joining the party.
Other concerns were voiced, including economic and social policies, but these
were less common than traditional ‘green’ issues. Uniting all these disputes was
a criticism of Labor’s approach to politics. Where Labor pursued interest
aggregation, the Greens saw appeasement of powerful stakeholders; where
Labor advocated political and social negotiation, they saw the dilution of
principles for electoral gain; and where the Greens wanted progressive
leadership, Labor was too often “just blowing with the wind”.

Conclusion

The interviews revealed a number of parallels between how Labor and Greens
politicians saw each other. Labor MPs criticised the minor party’s understanding
of political change, portraying it as impotent and ultimately naive; the Greens in
turn criticised Labor’s obsession with votes and interest groups, lamenting it as
weak and unprincipled. Certain Labor MPs perceived a clash between Labor’s
commitment to industrial growth and an aggressive brand of environmentalism;
most Greens politicians gladly prioritised conservation over what they saw as
destructive industrial practice. Labor MPs considered the party’s history in
government an inspiration, proof that they could effectively govern and legislate
progressive change; Greens figures looked at the same history and saw a trail of
disappointment and broken promises.

If the responses could be categorised as either programmatic or procedural -
referring to either ideological differences, or a broader approach to politics -
then the latter was more common. Especially within the Labor Party,
representatives were much more likely to identify a difference in attitudes to
political change than any great conflict between policy agendas. In their eyes, the
problem with the Greens was that they were “utopian”, “unrealistic”, a “party of dissent”. On the other hand, Greens politicians were more likely to cite policy disagreements, whether environmental, economic or social. But these disputes still traced the Green procedural problem with Labor. Greens MPs did not necessarily think that the major party opposed environmental protection or social justice outright, rather they thought the major party was “hopelessly divided” on these questions. If Labor politicians argued that the Greens was too small and inexperienced to ever really “change the world”, then Greens representatives considered Labor too nervous and conflicted, too entangled in the compromises of electoralism to ever drive a truly progressive agenda.
CHAPTER FOUR
Beautifully ugly? Minority government, 2010-2013

For a country used to decisive election results, August 21, 2010, was an anti-climactic night for Australians. Unlike previous elections, there were no triumphant speeches, no victory celebrations, at least not yet. As the Australian Electoral Commission counted the nation’s votes, analysts became increasingly aware that, for the first time in almost seventy years, no party would win an outright majority in the House of Representatives. With Labor holding 72 seats and the Coalition 73, each party would need the support of independents and minor party MPs to reach the critical mass of 76 votes. Reacting that night, both Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott were cautious, but optimistic. As Gillard conceded, “the people have spoken, but it's going to take a little while to determine exactly what they've said”.

For voters in 2010, the nation’s most recent period of federal minority government was a dim memory. Few could directly recall the early years of World War II, when two independents held the balance of power in the House of Representatives. After the 1940 election, Robert Menzies and the United Australia Party gained cross-bench confidence and a parliamentary majority, only to then lose it to John Curtin and Labor a year later, after Menzies lost support within his own party. In the seven decades following, Prime Ministers either enjoyed a majority courtesy of their own party, or assumed it with a pre-established coalition. This unbroken run encouraged a perception that majority government was “part of [Australia’s] natural order”.

But while hung parliaments were rare in federal politics, they were not completely alien to Australians. In the previous two decades, they occurred frequently enough at the state level. From 1990 to 2010, every Australian state

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and territory experienced at least one term of minority government. These usually incorporated independents, though they also occasionally involved minor parties. In minority situations like this, parliamentarians faced a “hierarchy” of potential relationships. These ranged from the more integrated, with a full coalition and blended ministry, to the more divided, with a basic supply and confidence agreement and little else. As Moon observed, the Australian arrangements were far from identical, with minority elements asserting themselves in different ways. Some made “particularistic” demands, seeking concessions for their constituents, while others attempted to change the political system more “generally”; some acted “collectively” to achieve common goals, while others made “individual” requests of major parties.

Examining the Australian examples, Moon argued that the most common local form of minority government was “ersatz majoritarianism”, where independents traded local benefits for broad confidence in a single party executive. Under this model, government largely functioned as usual, but with added sensitivity to independents. Moon did, however, identify certain cases where minority elements acted with a sufficiently collective and general spirit to be closer to what he called “minoritarianism”. In 1991, for instance, Nick Greiner’s Coalition government in New South Wales signed a Charter of Reform with independents, exchanging support for procedural changes to parliament, designed to make the system more accountable.

One MP to sign Greiner’s charter was Tony Windsor, the independent Member for Tamworth. Almost 20 years later, Windsor was now the federal Member for New England, one of five MPs deciding Australia’s next government. Alongside Windsor, another three of these five votes came from independent members.

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Rob Oakeshott and Bob Katter represented regional or rural electorates, while the newly elected Andrew Wilkie came from urban Tasmania. The final MP, Adam Bandt, was serving his first term as a representative for Melbourne, the only Greens politician in the House of Representatives. Initial commentary suggested that the three rural independents (or as the media dubbed them, the “three amigos”) would decide the final outcome. Together their votes were enough to give the Coalition confidence, which many presumed would appeal to their traditionally conservative electorates.  

In this context, the first MP to decide was Adam Bandt. Gillard later argued that this Greens support was more important than his single vote - it also gave Labor as many members as the Coalition, strengthening its bargaining position with the four independents. Bandt’s confidence did, however, come at a price. Attached to his support was a formally codified Agreement between the parties. Signed publically, the Agreement bound Labor to certain policies and processes submitted by the Greens. The most prominent of these was a deal on climate change, with Labor acknowledging that emissions reduction would “require a carbon price”. This was a step beyond the party’s election position, which promised to conduct a “citizens assembly” before introducing any pricing arrangement. The deal also further integrated Greens MPs into the mechanics of government. While still allowing Bandt and the party’s Senators to vote independently, it guaranteed fortnightly meetings between Labor and Greens leaders, while also ensuring consistent access to senior bureaucrats. After signing the paperwork, Bob Brown admitted that it posed some risks for his party (“there is always a little bit of reticence about stepping in the icy waters of political agreement”) but nonetheless considered it a tremendous, unprecedented opportunity for the federal Greens.

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In Moon’s typology, the Agreement was closer to minoritarianism than ersatz majoritarianism. Rather than simply exchanging local resources for confidence in Labor, the Greens sought to entrench their minority interests within government. It was also similar in design to the first document signed by the two parties - the original ‘Accord’, struck in 1989, between Tasmanian Labor and five ‘Green Independents’ (two of which were now the national party’s leader and deputy leader, Bob Brown and Christine Milne). Both demanded environmental concessions from Labor, and both negotiated procedural changes to their respective parliamentary systems. Importantly, both stopped short of placing Greens members within the ministry and executive government, something that later occurred at the state level in both Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory.

The day after Bandt and the Greens signed their agreement, Andrew Wilkie also announced his support for Labor. In a similar, but more modest deal, Wilkie exchanged his vote for increased funding to Hobart Hospital and regulation on poker machine gambling. With Labor now holding one more vote than the Coalition, the final choice rested with Katter, Oakeshott and Windsor - the original “three amigos”. As a candid Four Corners documentary on the period later showed, each approached the negotiations differently. Oakeshott, with an idealistic hope for consensus; Windsor, with a deep wariness of Abbott; and Katter, with a desire to avoid any association with the Greens. While the independents initially planned to move as a bloc, these differences splintered the group. On the 7th of September, the three made their decision - with Katter choosing Abbott, and Windsor and Oakeshott giving their confidence, and ultimately government, to Gillard. Swayed by Labor’s broadband and climate policies, as well as their negotiated commitments to regional Australia, Oakeshott claimed that it would be a productive and creative era of policy

development. “This is going to be a cracking parliament”, he said. “It’s going to be beautiful in its ugliness”. 16

This chapter examines the 43rd Parliament, the first federal minority government since the 16th. This was the first time that Labor depended on Greens support to form government in the House, and the first time the Greens possessed the sole the balance of power in the Senate. With a focus on the Labor and Greens relationship, from their codified Agreement to the practical functioning of parliament, the chapter asked both parties about the experience and lessons of the period. Was it beautifully ugly as Oakeshott predicted, or just plain ugly?

Labor on the minority government

While claiming government in September 2010, Julia Gillard conceded that the new parliament would be “more open” than previous ones, meaning Labor needed to work with other political forces to deliver “stable, effective and secure government”. 17 But did this eventuate? In each interview with Labor politicians, especially those serving at the time, the MP was asked about the party's first minority government since Curtin. They were questioned about the formal deals Labor signed with the Greens and independents; did they work for the Labor Party, and did they offer a useful model for future hung parliaments? Was the experiment a success?

The first thing to note from the interviews was that, within the federal party, most Labor MPs looked back on the government with some form of pride. The most positive remembered it as an ambitious, progressive and ultimately successful period of legislative activity - made even more impressive by the uncertainty of its hung parliament. These Labor representatives thought the

party negotiated the situation with sensitivity and intelligence, headlined by the skill of its Prime Minister, Julia Gillard. In Greg Combet’s view, the party made a difficult situation work:

“We made it effective I think - there was a record number of bills that passed. The Gillard period was a period of tremendous reform, notwithstanding that we were in minority government and the media circus that was going on all the time. Within the government there was a series of very capable ministers, and Julia Gillard was a very capable Prime Minister. It required legislation through both houses of parliament, where we didn’t have a majority in either house, and we got it all through … And we got all that stuff through because we treated the crossbenchers with respect and engaged them with the policy agenda and the formulation of legislation”.18

As Combet hinted, one way of judging the government was its sheer numerical success in the legislature. Before the 2013 election, The Guardian calculated that Gillard had passed the highest ratio of bills in Commonwealth history, and a number of Labor politicians cited this as proof of the period’s smooth parliamentary operation.19 Both Lisa Singh and Anna Burke noted that Labor enjoyed more legislative success than either Tony Abbott and Malcolm Turnbull, despite lacking the Coalition’s lower house majority.20 Like Combet, Singh attributed much of this to the political dexterity of Labor’s Prime Minister:

“I think that really came down to the leadership and negotiation style of Julia Gillard. She had a formidable negotiation style which I don’t think has been anywhere near matched by Tony Abbott or Malcolm Turnbull. Anthony Albanese, the leader of government business in the House, was also a great negotiator. We had a huge agenda to get a lot of really life changing legislation through this place and we did that in a very short space of time - the NDIS, the National Broadband Network, carbon

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18 Combet, Greg, (2nd of May, 2016), personal interview.
20 Burke, Anna, (11th of April, 2016), personal interview.
pricing, education funding. If you look at the big ticket items we got through, it was really quite amazing that we did that in a hung parliament”.  

From this perspective, the period’s legislative victories were tied inextricably to Julia Gillard’s personal savvy. Some Labor MPs even claimed that, under different leadership, the party would have struggled to gain the parliamentary traction that it did. Laurie Ferguson thought so, contrasting Gillard’s parliamentary talents with other alternatives:

“We would have liked to have other options [opposed to the hung parliament and its agreements with crossbenchers]. But the fact is that Gillard was such a good negotiator, she was very used to that in her former role as a union aligned solicitor … She didn’t have any of the arrogance of Rudd, and I think that with another leader we might not have been able to get so many outcomes”.

Whether Ferguson’s theory was right or not, or whether these skills came from some other place, most cross-bench MPs did express respect for Gillard’s leadership. As the Greens representative in the hung parliament, Adam Bandt argued that history would prove increasingly flattering to Gillard and her parliamentary achievements. In Rob Oakeshott’s final parliamentary speech, the MP spoke emotionally of his friendship with the Prime Minister, describing her as an honest politician who consistently upheld her end of their agreement. And in Tony Windsor’s autobiography, the independent wrote warmly about Gillard, comparing her favourably to Kevin Rudd, and even more favourably still to Tony Abbott.

A second suggestion from the Labor parliamentarians was that, on an institutional rather than individual level, the hung parliament suited their party more than the Liberal opposition. These figures argued that the Labor Party

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21 Singh, Lisa, (20th of April, 2016), personal interview.  
22 Ferguson, Laurie, (14th of March, 2016), personal interview.  
23 Bandt, Adam, (15th of March, 2016), personal interview.  
possessed certain qualities - a relationship with the labour movement, a commitment to incremental progress, an egalitarian aversion to snobbery - that helped it negotiate a diverse parliament. These were present in the period’s leadership, but not confined to it. In Lisa Singh’s view, many Labor MPs still possessed “that organiser mentality” (“bringing people together, persuading people why it’s good for them”) that made them “much better negotiators” than the Coalition. For Singh, a career in labour organising provided political lessons in humility and compromise not present in a Liberal Party education. According to Sue Lines, cross-bench MPs noticed these differences:

“The crossbenchers say it about us now. We are better negotiators and more open to getting people onside and getting them what they want. So right now with the crossbenchers, we’ll share our caucus materials with them, speaking notes and all that stuff. But the government, with that born to rule attitude, doesn’t know how to negotiate”.

Lines’ picture of the Liberal Party drew from an old Labor critique - of an elitist organisation, wedded to privilege, refusing to engage with others as equals. Labor, in this view, was different. The social outlook and professional history of its representatives meant the party could debate, persuade and eventually accommodate other interests, while respecting the political limits of their position. As Combet told it, this was precisely why Julia Gillard chose him as her Minister for Climate Change:

“I think the Liberals have basically been arrogant and as a result have been completely unsuccessful at government ... I think, within Labor, all of us are much more used to negotiating with other parties, compromising and trying to achieve pragmatic change. That’s essentially why Julia Gillard asked me to take the Climate Change portfolio - because I’d spent most of my life negotiating large things as a union official”.

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26 Singh, Lisa, (20th of April, 2016), personal interview
27 Lines, Sue, (16th of March, 2016), personal interview.
28 Combet, Greg, (2nd of May, 2016), personal interview.
These Labor MPs rejected Tony Abbott’s claim that the government was “confused and chaotic”, instead characterising it as a disciplined, prolific and surprisingly stable period of policy development.\textsuperscript{29} Some thought that, given the uncertain political climate, lasting the full three year term was itself an achievement. Anna Burke emphasised Labor’s precarious position, pointing out that if it lost the confidence of the House at any point, “the government would have fallen … and I don’t think people realised that”. The fact that this never happened was, in her eyes, testament to the party’s delicate management. As a Speaker of the House of Representatives, Burke rejected Abbott’s picture of disorder:

“I had the best vantage point, in the middle of it - I was speaker for most of the time in the hung parliament. There was this perception of chaos, but that’s Question Time. And that’s what people see and perceive and that’s what’s played on the news. But if you think that’s chaos, we’ve got that now, we had it in most parliaments I’ve been involved with - it’s the hullabaloo … But in an actual institutional sense, did the committees still meet? Yep. Did legislation still happen? Yep. Did public servants get paid? Yep”.\textsuperscript{30}

These positive assessments of minority government all focused on governance and parliament: the passing of legislation, the administering of bureaucracy, and the maintenance of a fragile lower house majority. But other Labor MPs articulated different concerns. Gai Brodtmann, a first term MP, described it as an unpleasant time to enter politics, with toxic rhetoric and a stressful parliamentary schedule.\textsuperscript{31} These politicians emphasised the parliament’s unique difficulties, particularly its political and electoral implications for Labor. They also tended to be far more negative in their judgement, generally considering the hung parliament a burden - one the government managed to overcome at times, but one that still contributed to Labor’s ultimate defeat.


\textsuperscript{30} Burke, Anna, (11th of April, 2016), personal interview.

\textsuperscript{31} Brodtmann, Gai, (21st of March, 2016), personal interview.
The first downside cited by Labor politicians related to the perception of instability surrounding the minority government. For them, its lack of certainty, embedded within the theatre and practice of parliament, made public leadership difficult for Julia Gillard, eroding any authority she managed to accumulate. In John Faulkner’s opinion, Gillard’s position sat awkwardly within the Australian political tradition:

“I think stability and clarity are very important things. The Australian people have never been comfortable with governments that are cobbled together in the way that had to be cobbled together after the 2010 election. Labor didn’t have any choice there, it was obviously important to try and form a government, and Julia Gillard was very successful in working with those on the crossbench in achieving that. But in my own view, I don’t think such governments have the strength or stability of governments with a clear majority”.32

Because of this, Faulkner found it hard to agree with MPs who considered the parliament a success. He thought they ignored its stark electoral reality. While acknowledging that Labor was “very effective” at handling the House of Representatives, the final judgement was up to voters:

“I don’t know why one would interpret this as an absolute triumph when you look at the result of the election that followed the hung parliament, where Labor was decimated. If it was such a triumph, why was Labor wiped out at the subsequent election?”.33

Other figures thought that minority government undermined even the most routine functions of leadership. Kelvin Thomson argued that the process of placating cross-bench MPs, ensuring their loyalty and parliamentary support, meant Labor lost the ability to assert itself. He compared the period to the Margaret Thatcher and Jeff Kennett administrations, figures he opposed, but who gained respect through their brash, unalloyed confidence:

32 Faulkner, John, (26th of April, 2016), personal interview.
33 Faulkner, John, (26th of April, 2016), personal interview.
“I thought that the hung parliament, not just the relationship with the Greens, was diabolical for Julia Gillard. It was very destructive of her capacity to lead and to be seen to be leading. So when Malcolm Turnbull comes out now and says ‘I’ve asked the Governor General to prorogue the parliament and we’ll meet again - and if we don’t get what we want there’ll be a double dissolution’, people go ‘gee, that’s impressive leadership’. But he’s able to do that because it’s not leaked beforehand. Whereas Julia Gillard was in the situation where the Greens and independents made it clear that, if she wanted them to support anything, she had to consult with them. And because they wanted the oxygen and publicity, Julia Gillard would have conversations with them and they’d immediately go off and report them to the media … She was never in a position to just go out and say “I’m going to do this” and then tomorrow do it”.³⁴

Labor politicians did acknowledge that other forces weakened Julia Gillard’s position. As Melissa Parke conceded, Tony Abbott doggedly and skillfully capitalised on any sign of Labor weakness: “We had such an effective opposition leader, who was just good at destroying and bringing things down … if you had someone more reasonable on the other side, it might not have been such a difficult thing”.³⁵ Other Labor MPs noted the corrosive influence of internal division, lamenting Kevin Rudd’s persistent, though often unspoken, challenge to Gillard’s leadership. But in both these cases there was a sense that the minority government made Labor’s problems even worse, exacerbating the tensions within parliament and the party room. These MPs remembered the hung parliament as a constant weight on the government, making all its endeavours more arduous than they should have been.

A second Labor problem with the minority government was its specific agreement with the Greens. Beginning with the so-called ‘Wattle signing ceremony’, where the agreement was enthusiastically introduced to the press, these representatives thought the party’s relationship with the minor party damaged the government. They considered the formal framework between the

³⁴ Thomson, Kelvin, (14th of April, 2016), personal interview.
³⁵ Parke, Melissa, (22nd of March, 2016), personal interview.
parties “unnecessary”, and in retrospect a mistake - repelling some swing voters, while also complicating Gillard’s agenda. In Bob Carr’s view, it allowed hostile groups to portray Labor as a hostage to the minor party’s policies:

“[the Greens agreement] enabled the right wing media to whip up a lot of resentment against the government … it enabled them to say ‘you’re only doing x or y because of Greens pressure’”.36

Carr did admit that, if placed in Gillard’s position after the 2010 election, he would have acted the same way, “rushing to conclude a deal with the Greens”. The agreement provided Labor with a sense of momentum going into negotiations with other parliamentarians. But “with the wisdom of hindsight”, it now seemed an error.37 In Andrew Leigh’s mind, these kinds of conservative campaigns were effective because the Greens appealed to a relatively small part of the electorate:

“It certainly had a cost. Among mainstream Australia, 90% of Australians don’t vote for the Greens, and a significant portion of those actively dislike the Greens. So being seen as having formed a formal alliance with the Greens did have an electoral price. [If the situation arose again] I expect there would be greater reluctance to come up with a formal deal”.38

Leigh’s point hinted at the social democratic fear that post material politics would, when presented aggressively, repel working class voters more invested in questions of economic distribution.39 Like Carr, Leigh sympathised with the reasoning behind Gillard’s deal, but concluded that, “on balance”, it hurt the government. For a similar reason, Chris Bowen considered the deal a failure, “an experiment that shouldn’t be repeated”. Bowen thought that, as party with different social base and approach to economic policy, the Greens relationship confused the party’s message:

36 Carr, Bob, (24th of May, 2016), personal interview.
37 Ibid.
38 Leigh, Andrew, (11th of March, 2016), personal interview.
“I think people need to know if they vote Labor they get Labor policies, they don’t get Greens policies. I think that was a fundamental mistake. I don’t say that as a criticism of Julia, just a statement in hindsight”. ⁴⁰

These MPs viewed elections and popular support as the parliament’s ultimate judge. If it caused voters to lose faith in the Labor government, it had to be considered a failure. And as Kelvin Thomson pointed out, the same lessons applied to the Greens:

“Both the Labor Party and the Greens got fewer votes at the 2013 election than they did at the 2010 election - so I don’t think that the electorate thought much of it. We had quite a lot of criticism for doing a deal with the Greens, or being in bed with the Greens, however you want to describe it. And the Greens for their part copped criticism for being associated with us, the government, and being identified with all our policies and mistakes and so on”. ⁴¹

The third problem Labor politicians had with the minority arrangement was the policy compromises it demanded. These Labor MPs argued that the process of post-election bargaining, where policy commitments were traded for support, created conflicts between the party’s earlier promises and the parliamentary settlement. The most commonly cited of these, and by far the most controversial, was the so-called ‘carbon tax’ associated with the Greens agreement. Labor’s eventual climate policy, created in tandem with cross-bench MPs, involved a limited fixed price. After three years, the price would shift to a market, linked to the European scheme, which would fluctuate based on supply and demand. The problem with this arrangement for Labor was that, while it had promised to act on climate change at the 2010 election, Julia Gillard had also assured that there would be “no carbon tax under a government I lead”. ⁴² While certain Labor figures considered this a matter of semantics, some commentators

⁴⁰ Bowen, Chris, (9th of December, 2015), personal interview.
⁴¹ Thomson, Kelvin, (14th of April, 2016), personal interview.
judged the fixed price a ‘tax’, and hence a broken promise. In Bob Carr’s view, this predicament was a direct result of Labor’s relationship with the Greens:

“Julia Gillard in the campaign had ruled out a carbon tax, she then agreed to introduce a measure that could be portrayed as a carbon tax. So that was a broken promise and it was hung around her neck. If she hadn’t rushed into an agreement with the Greens, and I’m not criticising her because I think anyone would have tried to secure their position, she could have had more flexibility on responding to climate change”.

As the Minister for Climate Change, Greg Combet admitted that Labor’s final model stemmed from Greens parliamentary leverage and policy demands. In his words, it was designed to “break the impasse over targets” between the parties, with the Greens accepting Labor’s floating rate in return for a limited fixed price. Some Labor MPs pointed to the similarities between this and Labor’s earlier CPRS, which contained one fixed year instead of three. Because of this, Wayne Swan suggested the actual Greens deal was more symbolic than substantive:

“Given that the Greens had sunk the emissions trading system, the least they could do was come back and agree to virtually the same one the second time around … Which was really what the agreement was about. I like Bob Brown. I think he’s a fine politician and I have a lot of respect for him. And I’d like to think that one of the reasons they came back and signed the agreement was precisely because they got it wrong the time before. Now you won’t hear them saying that - but I do think that there are people inside the Greens who think that’s what happened”.

Even if this was the intention, most Labor MPs figures accepted that the campaign against the carbon tax was effective. In the end, a considerable number of Australians believed the legislation was “in the teeth” of what the party promised at the 2010 election. The nomenclature was a moot point. If Tony

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43 Carr, Bob, (24th of May, 2016), personal interview.
45 Swan, Wayne, (10th of February, 2016), personal interview.
46 Thomson, Kelvin, (14th of April, 2016), personal interview.
Abbott possessed a gift for “destroying and bringing things down”, as Melissa Parke claimed, then it was most clearly expressed on carbon pricing. The Liberal opposition attacked Gillard’s legislation with stamina and ferocity. He pushed the message in parliament, in the media and at public rallies, even making a “blood pledge” to repeal it.\(^47\) According to Gai Brodtmann, Abbott’s crusade did serious damage to Labor’s political position, and was made possible by the Greens insistence on a fixed price:

“The fact that we made the deal with them on the fixed price was disastrous. It was disastrous politically and it was disastrous from a policy perspective. World’s best practice is a market based mechanism - the fact that we had the over-and-above fixed price was ludicrous. We lost a lot of skin over it”\(^48\)

So with all this considered, were Labor’s formal deals with the Greens and other independents a mistake? Labor answers to this question were divided into two groups, generally corresponding with an MP’s view on the minority government. Those who judged it a success usually approached the topic with a certain fatalism and acceptance. As Laurie Ferguson conceded, Labor would have preferred other choices, but parliamentary arithmetic limited its options.\(^49\) Sue Lines summed it up wistfully, concluding “it is what it is” - not an ideal situation, but one that nonetheless had to be managed.\(^50\) Others presented it as a choice between government and three years in opposition. In Greg Combet’s mind, the decision was clear:

“Did we want to govern or not? The answer was obviously yes, which meant we needed a relationship with the Greens. To follow that argument through, which usually focuses on whether we needed that ‘wattle signing ceremony’ with the Greens - and yes, of course, maybe we didn’t need that ceremony and the imagery wasn’t very good politically, but it was more

\(^48\) Brodtmann, Gai, (21st of March, 2016), personal interview.
\(^49\) Ferguson, Laurie, (14th of March, 2016), personal interview.
\(^50\) Lines, Sue, (16th of March, 2016), personal interview.
than just getting Adam Bandt’s vote in the Lower House. It was the reality that the Greens also controlled the Senate”. 51

Those with more pessimistic views of the experience were careful not to equate it with criticism of Julia Gillard’s leadership. Most acknowledged that it was only a failure in hindsight, and that the Prime Minister had sound reasons for acting as she did. These MPs instead argued that, if Labor had its time again, it would be “reluctant” to enter a formal arrangement with the Greens. 52 Chris Bowen suggested that minority government should ideally be “transactional”, with the parties working together when in agreement and against each other when opposed. 53 Importantly, this would involve no formal agreements or infrastructure between the organisations. In Bob Carr’s view, Labor could still gain Greens support without such a deal:

“Only with the wisdom of hindsight we can say it would have been best have avoided such a deal and have allowed them to vote according to their preference, measure by measure in the parliament. Clearly they wouldn’t have been voting a Labor government down to facilitate the election of Tony Abbott. They weren’t going to be voting against a confidence measure and, in retrospect, we would have avoided a lot of pain and a lot of criticism by not having a formal agreement”. 54

These two Labor views on the hung parliament emerged consistently across the interviews. One optimistic group of MPs judged the experiment a success, made even more admirable by the unpredictability of its context. These Labor politicians focussed on the period’s parliamentary operation, emphasising the government’s ability to pass legislation without a majority in either chamber. In this view, Gillard’s Labor was remarkably productive, with the leadership and institutional maturity required to achieve its policy goals. A second group looked at the same experience and saw a mistake. These Labor figures highlighted the parliament’s electoral consequences, arguing that instability damaged the party’s standing in the community - making it harder to lead, appear weak, and

51 Combet, Greg, (2nd of May, 2016), personal interview.
52 Leigh, Andrew, (11th of March, 2016), personal interview.
53 Bowen, Chris, (9th of December, 2015), personal interview.
54 Carr, Bob, (24th of May, 2016), personal interview.
contradict earlier promises. The two groups did not, however, necessarily clash on these points. Those with a positive view did not claim that the hung parliament was an electoral asset; nor did those with a negative view claim it was a policy failure. In the end, it came down to what each MP chose to emphasise. For those judging it on legislation, it was a success; for those judging it on popular support, it was an error, ultimately fatal for Labor.

The Greens on minority government

The Greens experience with minority government was complicated. From 2010 to 2013, the party secured its highest legislative priority, the carbon price, but at the same time its vote went substantially backwards. In the interviews conducted with Greens politicians, each was asked about the party’s navigation of minority government. Did the party’s formal agreement with Labor serve the Greens and the parliament well? For a party traditionally on the periphery of governance, did its new position give it more practical influence over policy? And did the closer association with Labor ultimately contribute to its disappointing election result?

Compared with their Labor peers, Greens politicians were more consistently positive about the experience of minority government, as well as the concept of divided parliament itself. Like the first group of Labor politicians, these Greens figures generally considered the Gillard era to be an energetic and progressive period of legislation - a rarity for the modern Labor Party, many claimed. They defended the government against its critics, arguing that any public perception of chaos was either false, politically motivated, or driven by factors outside the Greens. Adam Bandt, for instance, singled the Prime Minister out for praise:

“I think we achieved a lot of things that otherwise wouldn’t have been achieved - and I think history will rate Julia Gillard much more highly than she currently is. When you look at what was achieved with conservative
independents, progressive independents, the Greens and Labor working together, it was quite remarkable”.

Like Bandt, Christine Milne considered the arrangement “very effective”. She compared it with her previous experiences in minority government at the state level in Tasmania, which were generally filled with rancour and distrust. The original Accord, for instance, last just over a year, ended by an environmental disagreement over forestry policy. This time, the Labor and Greens relationship produced what she called the “biggest reform of this political generation”, carbon pricing and the clean energy package. Sarah Hanson Young agreed. While the relationship was “always going to be interesting”, with the parties still divided over policies like immigration and marriage equality, she considered it productive, citing similar evidence to Labor representatives:

“I think it served the country very well, we were able to achieve a lot of things and keep government ticking over. We were obviously very effective - and I’m sure you've got all the stats about how many bills we passed against how many bills Tony Abbott and Malcolm Turnbull passed in the last government”.

Greens figures tied the government’s legislative success to the greater integration of minority interests into policy making. According to Milne, much of it could be attributed to the formal processes established in the Agreement:

“We had regular meeting with Gillard, every week when the House was sitting. They were half hour meetings, at which she would have a things she wanted to discuss, we would have a list of things we wanted to discuss. And they would range from pieces of legislation, regulations, all manner of things we had on our minds ... It worked very effectively”.

A common theme across the interviews was that the party’s new prominence, expressed in arrangements like this, produced a more progressive Labor

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55 Bandt, Adam, (15th of March, 2016), personal interview.
56 Milne, Christine, (9th of August, 2016), personal interview.
57 Hanson Young, Sarah, (10th of October, 2016), personal interview.
58 Milne, Christine, (9th of August, 2016), personal interview.
government. Greens representatives claimed to provide creative friction and new ideas, pushing a usually cautious Labor party towards bolder policies. A general skeptic of Labor, Tim Hollo thought that the period was “reasonably progressive”, with the minor party driving it leftwards. For Milne, this was most clearly expressed in carbon pricing, something she claimed only happened because of Greens pressure. Richard Denniss, an advisor to Bob Brown at the 2007 election, who later researched Australian minor parties, thought the period was “more ambitious than usual … the carbon price, the NDIS, school funding, expansion of Medicare to dental, these were actual big, hard changes”. In his view, part of this could be traced to the minority influence, which the Greens wielded strategically:

“The Greens were quite adamant that they would only support the minority government if certain things were promised and delivered - and that included the carbon price. And Bob Brown, because he’d been in Parliament for a very long time, he didn’t just ask for commitments, he asked for a process to deliver them and timetable by which they’d be delivered. Andrew Wilkie on the other hand got a promise about pokies - but he didn’t get a process, he didn’t get a timetable and he didn’t get his reforms. So I think you’d have to say that at least some of its ambition came from minority elements within the government. But good politicians take opportunities when they come along. I’m sure there was plenty of Labor politicians that saw the minority agreement with the Greens as an excuse to push their own progressive policies on their colleagues”.

If Greens figures believed that the party’s presence pushed Labor towards the left, they were also more comfortable with the concept of divided government itself. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they thought that more voices made for a more robust democracy. Where John Faulkner worried about how Australians processed uncertainty, Greens MPs instead saw it as a source of creativity and deliberative rigour. The hung parliament coincided with Richard Di Natale’s first time in parliament, and the Senator considered it a superior model:

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59 Hollo, Tim, (16th of May, 2016), personal interview.
60 Denniss, Richard, (9th of June, 2016), personal interview.
“It was much more effective than the alternative. Multi-party government or power sharing government can produce great outcomes. It’s how the world works in many other countries. Australia’s unusual in that we don’t have a history around that”.  

Greens representatives suggested that majority government facilitated an unhealthy relationship between parties and business. Without multiple potential vetoes in parliament, deals could be made without scrutiny. As Milne put it, minority government produced “great outcomes” because it disrupted these opaque relationships:

“With majority government, parliament is a rubber stamp. Federally, less so, because the Senate actually has the power to review. But when Howard had a majority in both houses, the parliament was just treated with complete contempt. What was decided in the back rooms of the Liberal Party became law, regardless of other views that might exist in the parliament. Whereas in that period of minority government they had to negotiate everything. And most importantly, it meant that the handshakes in the backrooms between big business and executive government could not be delivered. They had to negotiate it on the floor of the House, so secret deals, even if they tried to still do them, came unstuck”.

Greens MPs also rejected the primary critique of minority politics, dismissing the claim that it was more chaotic than majority situations. They largely agreed with Anna Burke’s assessment, that what could have been precarious was remarkably solid in practice. According to Tim Hollo, the formal agreements structured parliamentary relationships, bringing a degree of certainty to the flux of negotiations:

“The conception in the public arena, driven by Abbott and driven by the mainstream press, that it was a period of uncertainty and the government could have fallen at any moment, was complete garbage. With the written agreements we had and the way the negotiations operated, it was solid. Those inside knew it was not going to fall … So in a reasonable world,

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61 Di Natale, Richard, (20th of April, 2016), personal interview.
62 Milne, Christine, (9th of August, 2016), personal interview.
[the agreements] would have been good - because it would have given people that confidence, and the government could have got on with its job even more firmly than it did. And it was an extraordinarily successful period of by any measure, other than public sentiment”. 63

So why, then, did the government fail the parties electorally? Despite these stated achievements, the period’s stability and legislative ambition, both organisations lost a significant number of voters in 2013. Tony Abbott, the minority government’s strongest and most persistent critic, won the following election comfortably. The first Green response to this puzzle was to emphasise problems within Labor. They emphasised the government’s internal division and unsolved question of leadership, a dynamic they considered destructive. Di Natale attributed much of the party’s disappointing election result to this disunity:

“You had a hugely divided Labor Party. You can’t estimate how much the internal division, the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd, what that did to undermine what was on balance an effective government… If the Labor Party had been more functional, then we may have both been able to benefit from the arrangement. Part of it was that we were associated with a very weak and divided Labor Party at the time”. 64

Adam Bandt agreed that much of the government’s failure could be traced to behaviour within the Labor Party. This went beyond disunity, however. According to Bandt, a significant group within Labor wanted to see the relationship fail:

“I think part of the untold story is how much of the right wing of the Labor Party sabotaged it internally. I think there were many people who did not want Labor and the Greens working together - because they’d much rather work with the Liberals and the Greens, and consider themselves closer politically to the Liberals than to the Greens. So when we started doing things that might have had an impact on coal, or an impact on pokies, they went out of their way to tear down Julia Gillard and to join in the pile onto a Prime Minister that had a lot to manage in

63 Hollo, Tim, (16th of May, 2016), personal interview.
64 Di Natale, Richard, (20th of April, 2016), personal interview.
order to keep things afloat. And since then, the right of the Labor Party have spoken out and said “we’ll never enter an arrangement with the Greens ever again”.65

Another commonly cited reason for the government’s electoral failure was the ability of certain, hostile groups to malign minority politics in the electorate. Somewhat begrudgingly, Di Natale acknowledged that, while he preferred multi party politics, it was a relatively new phenomenon in Australian public life. This meant the model exasperated certain groups, like journalists, who lost their privileged position as gatekeepers:

“I understand much of the commentary was negative. That was for a few reasons. One is that there’s no history around that [multi-party, minority government] and instead of people being fed leaks about internal discussions, much of that debate was happening publically, and that’s a new dynamic - that some of the contentious areas are actually the subject of debate among the people forming government” 66

Contrary to the more pessimistic voices within Labor, however, these Greens figures believed that unease with minority politics could be overturned. Further exposure could normalise the model. Christine Milne described resistance to minority politics as “old fashioned”, an opposition concentrated within the major parties. In her eyes, traditional notions of executive government were undemocratic:

“The [idea of] ‘the government not being in control’ is from people who are used to executive government expect to be able to decide something in cabinet and get it through the parliament. It’s an expression of democracy - if you don’t have a majority, it’s because the people have elected a range of views that they want discussed. The people who say that are married to an old-fashioned two-party system where the executive runs the show” 67

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65 Bandt, Adam, (15th of March, 2016), personal interview.
66 Di Natale, Richard, (20th of April, 2016), personal interview.
67 Milne, Christine, (9th of August, 2016), personal interview.
If major parties struggled with minority politics, resisting its centrifugal force, so too did other groups outside the parliament. For Adam Bandt, it was a “ferocious troika of Tony Abbott, Rupert Murdoch and fossil fuel interests that worked together to tear it down and deny it legitimacy from day one”.\(^{68}\) Preferring the majoritarian status quo, these groups saw minority politics as a threat. As Hollo presented it, the opposing force represented a constellation of hostile institutions:

“The neoliberal consensus in public life did not want it to succeed. The idea that there could be a reasonably progressive Labor government in coalition with the Greens driving it further to the left was completely antithetical to what those who run the show want. Obviously Tony Abbott, obviously, the Murdoch press, but frankly, and this is where I find the theory of hegemony incredibly powerful, also the ABC and Fairfax press, which are ostensibly centre-left … For them, the idea that there could be a successful Labor/Greens government at the federal level was completely out of the question”.\(^{69}\)

While most Greens figures thought the government was reasonably successful, at least legislatively, some recognised that it ended in electoral defeat. These politicians accepted a link between their lost votes and their relationship with Labor; either because of the agreement’s limiting influence on party demands, Labor’s internal dysfunction, or because of its association with major party politics. This debate flared up again during the 2016 federal election, when Adam Bandt suggested that Greens MPs should enter future Labor ministries. Lee Rhiannon thought the party should be cautious about tightening the relationship:

“It will be interesting to see how history judges it. Going into formal alliances with Labor needs to be really closely considered. Do we go into formal alliances? What’s also being tossed around is whether it would be better to guarantee them supply, and they judge issues as they come up. Some people would argue against that, saying you should only go in when

\(^{68}\) Bandt, Adam, (15th of March, 2016), personal interview.

\(^{69}\) Hollo, Tim, (16th of May, 2016), personal interview.
you know you’re going to get something. And yeah we got climate change, but most of the other stuff in the agreement we didn’t get - Labor just never moved on it. I think we’re still learning a lot in how we manage that, and what it means when you can form government. I think you could still put forward a set of demands that you think Labor should do when they form government. But until we get more experience, we have to be really careful about going into those formal relationships to form government. Partly that’s because its perception for our own party - and also achieving change”.

Rhiannon’s interpretation mirrored Bob Carr’s argument within the Labor Party. Both thought that the formality was stifling and unnecessary, carrying with it significant electoral implications. According to Milne, however, Rhiannon’s alternative proposal was itself flawed. She experienced a similar, loose arrangement in Tasmania, when Labor refused to accept Greens confidence after the 1996 election - “the first and only time I know of, in the Westminster system, where a party was offered government and refused to take it” - and the Liberal Party governed with a Greens minority. Without a formal agreement, the parliamentary situation was unsustainably volatile:

“The thing about not having an agreement and the numbers are close ... every time they walk into the parliament they have no idea whether they’re going to be sabotaged. You could move no confidence in them any day”.

In the Australian Capital Territory, the Greens possessed an even closer relationship with the Labor government than the federal case. Occupying the balance-of-power after the 2012 election, Shane Rattenbury granted Labor confidence, in return for a position in the government’s cabinet. It was the second example of this occurring after Nick McKim entered the Tasmanian ministry. Rattenbury conceded that the tighter arrangement carried some risks for the Greens. In his experience, when government went well, major parties tended to benefit, but when it went badly, smaller parties faced disproportionate

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70 Rhiannon, Lee, (16th of March, 2016), personal interview.
71 Milne, Christine, (9th of August, 2016), personal interview.
blame. All things considered, however, Rattenbury thought the new legislative opportunities clearly outweighed these downsides:

“If the Greens vote continues to grow, which we obviously hope and believe it will, there will be an inevitability about the fact the Greens and ALP will need to work together. And I would say we’ve been able to demonstrate an effective working model here. I would encourage both my federal colleagues and the ALP’s federal members to reflect on it a little bit - you can make a positive and constructive government”. 72

Across the interviews, Greens MPs were more consistently positive about the hung parliament than their Labor colleagues. While some thought the formal agreement limiting, most considered the Gillard government to be uncommonly progressive, as well as uncommonly productive. The arrangement’s chief achievement, and something mentioned in most interviews, was the introduction of carbon pricing; something Greens politicians argued was a direct result of minority politics. When Greens figures expressed a problem with the arrangement, it tended to involve political rather than policy concerns. Its representatives were aware that, while the party enjoyed a high point of parliamentary influence, it also lost a significant amount of electoral support. Because of this bind, there remains a live debate within the party over just how close the formal relationship should be. In the aftermath of the Gillard government, however, Greens figures considered the experience an encouraging one. Most thought that, with Greens influence, minority politics produced a more progressive Labor government.

Conclusion

While the institutional responses to minority government differed in some ways, certain parallels arose between the two parties. Both Labor and the Greens generally considered the government a policy success - ambitious, proactive and savvy in parliament. Reforms like carbon pricing, education funding and

72 Rattenbury, Shane, (2nd of June 2016), personal interview.
disability insurance were cited by both groups as proof of its achievements. Even skeptics of the arrangement within Labor did not challenge this narrative. Based on this criteria, it was a “positive and constructive government”, in Rattenbury’s formulation.

A substantial group within Labor, however, considered the formal agreement a political burden, one that contributed to the party’s defeat in 2013. For these MPs, the hung parliament created an image of chaos, repelled voters who disliked the Greens, and forced Labor to compromise on its election promises. The minority government was in this view an electoral millstone, regardless of its policy achievement. There were echoes of this political consideration within the Greens - Rhiannon, for instance, thought the party should be wary about signing a future agreement - but it was less common.

The lessons each party derived from minority government, the first in almost 70 years, were therefore contradictory. On one hand, it proved that a Labor and Greens minority parliament could produce effective government, especially within the legislature. On the other, it suggested the same dynamic carried significant, primarily negative electoral implications. This is a bind that continues to frame the partisan discussion around the relationship.
CHAPTER FIVE
Climate change and carbon pricing, 2007-2013

Many popular and academic discussions on the relationship between Labor and the Greens identify a conflict between trade unions and environmentalists. As the two parties grew out of different social movements, attached to different interests - Labor beginning in the late 19th century as the political arm of organised labour; the Greens forming just under a century later, as the parliamentary extension of environmental campaigns - certain scholars suggest the groups will find themselves on different sides of conservation disputes.\(^1\)

Because of their position in the production process, relying on the profitability of the “factories, mines or mills” often criticised by green groups, labour groups can take instinctively “productivist” positions on environmental questions.\(^2\) In this pessimistic view at least, the parties will struggle to sustain cooperation, which is inevitably undermined by the ‘jobs versus the environment dilemma’.

Not all scholarly opinion, however, accepts this structural hostility. Other views complicate the picture, suggesting the relationship is either more ambiguous or compatible than the dilemma allows. Firstly, scholars point out that, while the two possess different starting motivations, the groups actually share an interest in regulating capitalism; uniting them against right wing politicians promoting laissez faire forms of social organisation.\(^3\) Secondly, because the consequences of environmental degradation tend to fall hardest on working class communities, some suggest that labour carries an even greater stake in conservation than middle and upper citizens.\(^4\) Thirdly, and more broadly, modern work on trade unions often challenges the narrow economic logic underpinning the ‘conflict’.\(^5\) With the rise of ‘social unionism’, many unionists now pursue a wider political

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\(^1\) Ratzel, Nora and Uzzell, David, (2011), ’Trade unions and climate change: the jobs versus environment dilemma’, *Global Environmental Change*, vol.21, iss.4, pp.1215-1223.


\(^3\) Barca, Stefanie, ‘On working class environmentalism’, *Interface*, vol.4, iss.2, pp.61-80.


mission, beyond just pay and conditions, and into the broader sphere of working class life.

Across the interviews, opinion within Labor and the Greens on the dilemma was mixed, though some supported its central claim. On the Labor side, both Chris Bowen and Greg Combet perceived an “essential difference” between a party committed to working class interests and economic growth, and a party “emphasising the environment above all else”.

This sense was even stronger among Greens politicians, a majority of whose politicisation stories involved a disillusionment with Labor’s environmental policy. In Christine Milne’s view, both major parties shared a belief in the abundance of natural resources, which humanity could exploit without repercussion:

“The fundamental thing with the Labor party, and I go back to the philosophy of both Labor and Liberal, is that they both agree that the earth’s resources are there to be exploited by humanity … The only difference between them is that they fight over who should get the profits from the spoils. So the Liberals think the owners of capital should be making all the money, and the Labor Party thinks that, as you convert the free natural resources into something, the workers should get their fair share”.

Not everyone, however, accepted the dichotomy. This was more common in Labor discussions, with certain MPs drawing a link between the party’s egalitarian philosophy and environmentalism. Both Tony Burke and Kelvin Thompson joined Labor because of conservation campaigns. Burke, who later became Minister for the Environment under Rudd and Gillard, saw no serious tension between the two movements:

“That characterisation [the ‘jobs versus the environment’ dilemma] leaves out the concept of Labor being a party that believes in equity. And as long as equity is something you don’t believe should just exist in the snapshot

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6 Bowen, Chris, (9th of December, 2015), personal interview.
Combet, Greg, (2nd of May, 2016), personal interview.
7 Milne, Christine, (9th of August, 2016), personal interview.
8 Thomson, Kelvin, (14th of April, 2016), personal interview.
of the current generation, that it should be an intergenerational principle, then the conservation principles are exactly the same as everything we deal with in economic policy. If the Labor Party can very easily say ‘it’s not fair for someone to be massively disadvantaged now’, in the same way it’s not fair for future generations to be massively disadvantaged by environmental degradation’.  

This chapter explores this alleged jobs versus the environment dilemma through climate politics in the Rudd and Gillard governments. The economist Ross Garnaut described carbon pricing as Australia’s “diabolical problem”, and its lingering influence over Labor’s period in office constituted a saga of its own.  

The period evades easy categorisation, combining both initial legislative failure and eventual success. For Labor and Greens relations, the story was even more complex. Under Kevin Rudd, the Greens first opposed Labor’s Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, even as it failed in the Senate; under Julia Gillard, they supported its Clean Energy Act, even though Labor figures claimed it resembled the initial plan. Because of this, climate politics under Rudd and Gillard remains a live debate between the two parties - with both groups producing their own narratives to explain the difficult history.

Comparing these two terms of climate policy - one unsuccessful, the other successful - the chapter suggests a few points about environmentalism and the broader relationship. Firstly, the period highlighted the centrality of parliament in shaping partisan interaction. When Labor and the Greens depended on each other for a legislative majority, they cooperated productively; when the situation was more ambiguous, they did not. Secondly, while the jobs versus the environment dynamic did influence party positions, equally significant was their underlying approach to politics and social change. Labor MPs criticised the Greens for an alleged naivety, a stubborn refusal to deal and compromise; Greens MPs accused Labor of diluting their scheme, in an unlikely attempt to appease hostile interests. Thirdly, and in spite of the alleged dilemma and the

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9 Burke, Tony, (10th of February, 2016), personal interview.
differences it implied, Gillard’s term showed that significant environmental collaboration between the parties was still possible. While Labor’s first attempt failed, in the end it was Labor and the Greens against the Liberal and National parties - two camps divided by different notions of conservation, politics and economics.

The Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (2007-2010)

Just a week after Kevin Rudd was elected as Prime Minister, he travelled to Bali, Indonesia, to address the United Nations Conference on Climate Change. There, to a rapturous and standing ovation, he announced his ratification of the ‘Kyoto Protocol’, the UN treaty on greenhouse gas reduction. His first decision as Prime Minister, it was, in the context of his predecessor John Howard, a symbolically significant act. For the past five years, Howard had refused to sign the agreement, dismissing it as “next to useless” and a burden on Australia’s economy.11 Now in Bali, Rudd framed the choice on a grand ethical scale. Labor signed the Protocol “because we believe that climate change represents one of the greatest moral, economic and environmental challenges of our age … Australia now stands ready to assume its responsibility in responding to this challenge”.12

For the Greens, Rudd’s decision was a long time coming. The environmental movement had campaigned on emissions reductions for over a decade, and this was an “historic and overdue step” in the right direction.13 It was certainly better than anything Howard countenanced. But while Rudd’s move encouraged Greens MPs, some noticed other signs they considered worrying, even foreboding. For one, they felt removed from the process. Christine Milne, the party’s spokesperson on climate change, recalled being shut out of the Bali conference, she believed intentionally:

“When [Rudd] ratified the Kyoto Protocol and then went to Bali and the UNFCCC where he was treated as great hero, he deliberately excluded me from the invitations list of the Australian contingent. I found that extraordinary. This is a new Labor Prime Minister who’s just done something which Greens had been campaigning for forever, we were really excited that the Kyoto Protocol had finally been ratified, and Labor was making it very clear that the Greens were not welcome - that this was when Labor was taking back the climate agenda”.

Greens figures expressed two early, related concerns about Labor’s trajectory under Rudd: that the party was institutionally antagonistic towards the Greens, and that its eventual legislation would be insufficiently ambitious. Tim Hollo, a senior advisor to Milne, remembered feeling ‘mixed’ about the situation, which was reinforced by his early interactions with the government:

“All of us were very torn on it. It was a delight to see the back of the Howard government and it was a delight to see some of the rhetorical leadership that Kevin Rudd was putting on things like Kyoto and the apology. But there was a certain amount of cynicism as well, from those of us who were deep in the policy analysis of what they were doing. And it very quickly became apparent to us inside how little they actually intended to do, and how antagonistic they were towards us … I was in multiple meetings with senior Labor ministers early on when they put it to us in no uncertain terms that they had no intention of ever giving us any wins, of ever negotiating serious climate action with us”.

While Greens figures reported skepticism towards the government’s substantive intentions, they did welcome Labor’s change in rhetoric. Where Howard claimed to be a climate “realist”, weary of the assertions made by advocates and scientists, Rudd placed the “great moral challenge” at the centre of the government’s agenda. In her first speech as the Minister for Climate Change in

14 Milne, Christine, (9th of August, 2016), personal interview.
15 Hollo, Tim, (16th of May, 2016), personal interview.
February 2008, Penny Wong made it clear that a new Labor government meant a new era in climate policy. “Over many years, scientists have gathered a body of evidence which makes the case the climate change is real and is being caused by human activity”, she said. “Now it’s up to us - future generations will look back on us and ask what we did” 17

While Wong outlined Labor’s guiding principles, its final Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) was not released until the year’s end. The party planned an extended design phase to develop its position, hiring economist Ross Garnaut to review the policy area, as well as producing its own ‘green’ and ‘white’ papers. These were intended to collate expert opinion and solicit community sentiment, establishing the reform’s intellectual and social foundations. Their progressive release, however, raised as many questions as they answered. While united on the need to legislate for emissions reductions and implement a ‘trading scheme’ in particular, the reports also exposed some of the policy’s increasingly significant fault-lines. 18 Garnaut’s submission, released in September, called for a ‘pure’ emissions trading scheme, applied to all industries, with no free permits and a limited reliance on international offsets. 19 The government’s green and white papers came to a different conclusion. The green paper, released in July, supported an emissions trading scheme, but also advocated exempting certain sectors, such as forestry and agriculture. It also suggested granting free permits to industries exposed to international competition. 20 The white paper, released in December, shared this position, but extended the assistance even further. 21

The policy debates produced by these reviews - particularly over concessions granted to heavy industry, as well as overall targets - constituted a lasting and significant point of difference between Labor and the Greens. On the Labor side, Wong defended the environmental rationale behind assistance. She rejected the claim that Labor was simply prioritising industrial security over conservation, or that it moderated the scheme because of its material links to industrial unions. This was because, if enacted alone, an indiscriminate price could drive production offshore, to nations with weaker regulatory schemes than Australia:

“One of the main problems the emissions intensive, trade exposed industry assistance was designed to address was ‘carbon leakage’. Carbon leakage would arise if Australia imposed a carbon price on companies facing international competition, whose competitors did not have to pay a carbon price in their home countries. The risk here was that these industries would reduce production in Australia and boost production in countries without a carbon price... The issue with industry assistance was not that the Greens wanted to put the environment ahead of the economy, while Labor wanted to put the economy ahead of the environment – rather the Greens wanted to impose higher economic costs for lower environmental benefits”.

Wong’s reasoning did not convince Greens MPs. Bob Brown was contemptuous, describing the White Paper as “a global embarrassment and a recipe for global catastrophe”. Its politicians saw two core problems with Labor’s plan. In the Greens view, it gave too much compensation to high emitting industries, as well as setting what they saw as meagre reductions targets, at 5-15% by 2020 depending on global agreements. Incrementalism was not enough, particularly when confronted with what they saw as existential crisis.

For Wong, this Greens position was unrealistic, both ‘absolutist’ and

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22 Wong, Penny, (19th of August, 2016), personal correspondence.
‘unilateralist’; oblivious to the uncertainty inherent in international negotiations, and the consequences for Australia if they proved disappointing.25

On these points, the Coalition’s position was less clear. While it backtracked on its complete resistance to carbon pricing in the months before the 2007 election (with John Howard even promising to implement a mild emissions trading scheme if re-elected) the opposition remained deeply divided on the question.26 Elements within the Coalition advocated carbon pricing, while others questioned its urgency, even its necessity. The first Liberal leader after Howard, Brendan Nelson, wanted Australia to delay its policy - waiting for international agreements before taking a stance.27 Its second leader, Malcolm Turnbull, supported an emissions trading scheme in principle, but reacted to the White Paper cautiously.28 Andrew Robb, the opposition spokesperson on emissions trading, was even more circumspect, arguing that even a 5% reduction by 2020 would be a “big ask for business”.29

Situated between these two blocs, the second major point of conflict between Labor and the Greens stemmed from the government’s position in the Senate. Labor faced a dilemma: to negotiate its legislation with an ambivalent opposition, or seek a different path through a mix of Greens and independents. Neither was simple. To go through the Coalition required a delicate management of skeptical MPs, to go through the crossbench required all seven of its votes. Some of these, like the Greens Senators, were enthusiastic supporters of emissions reduction; others, like Family First representative Steve Fielding, were much more cynical about it. In this context, Rudd and Wong chose to pursue the support of the Coalition. A difficult, but monumental decision, it hinted at different approaches to politics and political change. According to Wong, the

25 Wong, Penny, (19th of August, 2016), personal correspondence.
29 Ibid.
choice gave Labor its best chance to successfully pass the legislation, but also to
entrench the policy politically:

“[We] negotiated with the then Opposition Leader Malcolm Turnbull,
who favoured action to tackle climate change, because we wished to secure
bipartisan agreement for the carbon pollution reduction scheme. The
CPRS was a major environmental and economic reform for Australia,
designed to tackle climate change for decades to come. The track record
of reform in Australia is that such major changes are more likely to have
lasting impact when they enjoy bipartisan support. By contrast, reforms
which lack bipartisan support run the risk of being undone when there is
a change of government”. 30

In Wong’s opinion, the 2013 election only proved her theory. A now hostile
Coalition, having rejected carbon pricing and won back government, repealed
Labor’s policy - erasing the progress gained over the previous three years. For
the Greens, however, Wong’s decision was a strategic error; proof of its
antagonism towards the minor party, as well as its misguided dependency on
‘catch all’ politics. If Labor saw permanence in compromise, the Greens saw a
self-defeating timidity. Milne accepted that Labor desired bipartisanship, but
rejected it as a tactic:

“They made that decision because they believed, like with the GST, that
you can’t do anything without bipartisanship - except the irony of that is
there was no bipartisanship on the GST. Labor opposed it and eventually
caved. But nevertheless, in their heads, it was a scary new thing to do and
they didn’t have the guts to do it with the Greens, so they made a decision
to do it with the Coalition”. 31

More than this, Milne argued that the theatre of bipartisanship (“the Penny and
Macca show”, as she described it, referring to the Coalition’s new shadow
minister, Ian Macfarlane) served to exclude the Greens from climate policy. In

30 Wong, Penny, (19th of August, 2016), personal correspondence.
31 Milne, Christine, (9th of August, 2016), personal interview.
Tim Hollo’s opinion, while Labor would not admit it publically, its decision followed a clear “political calculus”, directed primarily at the Greens:

“They made it abundantly clear to us that it was a political decision on their part, at a very high leadership level - that they were not intending to negotiate climate legislation with the Greens … I think there was two reasons. They think their supporters at the centre to right end of their spectrum would hate it, and there’s probably some element of truth to that, but probably not as badly as they expect. But secondly, they feel that the more they negotiate with the Greens, the more they deal with us on a mature level, the more the Greens become a clear part of the political furniture, which threatens Labor”.\(^{32}\)

For Hollo, the Senate numbers offered Labor an ‘excuse’ to circumvent the Greens. He presented Nick Xenophon and Steve Fielding, the two independent Senators, as both unpredictable and persuadable. But while Xenophon was open to emissions reduction legislation, Fielding’s stance was far more challenging. The Victorian Senator had recently flown to the United States to explore the topic, returning suspicious of the central claims made by climate advocates.\(^{33}\)

It was in this uncertain parliamentary context that Labor introduced its CPRS to the House of Representatives, in May 2009. After 18 months of planning and reviewing, Greg Combet, Labor’s Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change, presented the party’s case in the House, where it carried a clear majority. Like many Labor speeches on the bill, Combet balanced a conviction in climate conservation with a sensitivity to the threat of recession. On the one hand, the Rudd government “accepted the science on the issue of climate change”, as well as the importance of Australia “playing its part in international action”. On the other, it was conscious of the deepening Global Financial Crisis, and the need to ensure its scheme was “economically responsible”.\(^{34}\) An ideal policy would

\(^{32}\) Hollo, Tim, (16th of May, 2016), personal interview.


balance these material and environmental objectives, something Labor had attempted to do through extensive industry consultation.

If as Wong stated, the government hoped to gain Coalition support and a swift parliamentary victory, the ensuing debate showed just how big the differences between the parties were - and just how difficult compromise with either would be. Labor pitched its case directly to the opposition, whose assistance their legislative strategy depended on. But even with increased industry aid, Turnbull dismissed the CPRS. While not ruling out a future carbon price, the opposition leader argued that the scheme threatened Australian jobs, while delivering “no environmental gain”. Australia should instead wait, following international developments rather than anticipating them. On its other flank, the Greens was just as lukewarm. The minor party rearticulated its position, making the opposite criticism of Labor’s legislation. If the Coalition presented the bill as too reckless, the Greens hoped for a less cautious package (“unless we deal with the science, unless we get rid of incrementalism, unless we go for deep cuts, there is no point in doing what the government is doing”). As a result, Labor did not have the votes to secure its bill. For the first time, on August the 13th, the Senate rejected the CPRS.

Labor’s legislative failure was a product of its central parliamentary dilemma - it was still pressed between a skeptical Coalition and an impatient Greens party. The first defeat of the CPRS did little to change this dynamic. Confronted with the same situation, Labor chose to continue with its original decision - hoping to solicit Coalition support the second time around. With the opposition rejecting Labor’s initial plan, Wong and Macfarlane engaged in another, often public round of negotiation. Macfarlane demanded greater concessions to the bill, with more help for trade exposed industries, increased compensation for electricity generators, and the permanent exclusion of agriculture. While these

35 Wong, Penny, (19th of August, 2016), personal correspondence.
exacerbated Greens problems with the initial plan, Labor agreed to modify each point in exchange for an increasingly divided Coalition’s acquiescence. Pleased with the changes, Macfarlane came to a verbal agreement with Wong on the 24th of November. According to Milne, the new scheme was less palatable than the one she just voted against:

“If you were going to get a bipartisan agreement between Liberal and Labor you were always going to get the lowest common denominator, because the Liberals were never going to anything that was effective in reducing emissions from fossil fuels. But then again, neither was Labor particularly keen on that, because of its long association with the mining and logging unions … And of course it went from bad to worse, they negotiated down, down, down until it was completely useless”.

Greens figures claimed that there was little internal division over the decision to reject the compromise. Janet Rice compared the settlement to her underwhelming experiences in forestry conservation. While the legislation possessed the facade of environmentalism, the Senator thought it still reflected a threatened industry veto - “[the CPRS] was crafted so it was something that the fossil fuel interests could live with”. The Greens accused Labor of pursuing a milquetoast form of ‘catch all’ politics, concerned with reassuring even the most hostile stakeholders, to the detriment of the scheme’s integrity. While Wong rejected this accusation, especially its pejorative edge (“the assistance was not included to ‘satisfy industry demands’ or to ‘get industry on board’ … it was included to ensure Australia reduced its emissions at the lowest cost to the economy”) other Labor figures did present popular and industry acceptance as one of the scheme’s virtues. Their reasoning mirrored Wong’s defence of bipartisanship. The he legislation was more likely to survive if unburdened by significant, powerful opposition. Gai Brodtman, who worked for the

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40 Milne, Christine, (9th of August, 2016), personal interview.
41 Hollo, Tim, (16th of May, 2016), personal interview.
42 Rice, Janet, (11th of April, 2016), personal interview.
43 Wong, Penny, (19th of August, 2016), personal correspondence.
government on industry engagement at the time, considered this support significant:

“Industry was ready … They were setting up their systems and their accounting systems to take it on… So industry was ready, the community was ready. Indigenous communities were ready with their sequestration approach. Farmers were ready, because we had a system set up for them in terms of being able to utilised their land that wasn’t being used for grazing or crops. So it was a thing of beauty, incredibly comprehensive and world’s best practice”.44

With the Coalition leader and shadow minister backing the new CPRS, commentators presumed the Greens critique superfluous. A combined Labor and Coalition constituted an overwhelming majority in each chamber of parliament. But just days after Macfarlane agreed to Wong’s deal, the divisions within the opposition finally spilled over. Opponents of climate policy challenged the party’s leadership, with Joe Hockey and Tony Abbott confronting Turnbull.45 Abbott, the candidate most vehemently opposed to the CPRS, was considered an unlikely, outside chance. He won by a single vote.46 While the fallout from the change was widespread, it radically altered the parliamentary dynamic on climate policy. Without opposition support, Labor could no longer pass its bill without the Greens. But after the government presented the same legislation to parliament, the minor party held its position. Its decision to oppose the CPRS represents the third and most significant historical dispute between the two parties on climate. Greens figures remain convinced of their choice, despite ongoing Labor critiques. As Adam Bandt argued, the party could not support a policy designed in consultation with the Coalition:

44 Brodtmann, Gai, (21st of March, 2016), personal interview.
“[Rudd] picked his dancing partner and chose to develop a scheme that was browed down enough for the Liberals to be able to support it. And then he pushed it to the point where it cost Malcolm Turnbull the leadership and, instead of picking up the phone to the Greens and saying “well, I’ve got this scheme I’ve negotiated with the Liberals, can I talk to you now about how we might pass it through the Senate”, he just bowled it up expecting us to vote for it. That’s no way to run a country. If your plan A falls down, you go to plan B. You don’t just turn up to other people with plan A and expect them to pass it”.47

As the party’s spokesperson, Milne also complained about Labor’s procedural approach to the bill. The Greens demanded a new policy from the government, or at least serious amendments to the existing legislation. In her opinion, the government was not interested in altering its bill to gain Greens support:

“The Greens came back in February 2010, with a compromise proposal. We contacted Penny Wong and asked if we could discuss it. She flew to Hobart to Bob’s office, and we sat down and presented to her the compromise, which was essentially what we achieved between 2010 and 2013 ... Penny Wong refused to engage with it - she just said ‘I will not present this to the Prime Minister’. Now we were shocked, because we thought they were actually genuine about trying to get a carbon price, no matter how stupid was their decision of trying to go down the path of negotiating with the Coalition”.48

Labor’s interpretation of the history was very different. Unanimously, its MPs considered the Greens opposition a mistake. In their eyes, the spectacle of the Greens voting down the government’s CPRS - an environmental party opposing Australia’s first national price on carbon - represented the worst possible consequence of doctrinaire politics. MPs described it as “naive”, “outrageous”, a case of “throwing the baby out with the bathwater”.49 Greg Combet, Labor’s Parliamentary Secretary at the time, dismissed Bandt’s defense:

47 Bandt, Adam, (15th of March, 2016), personal interview.
48 Milne, Christine, (9th of August, 2016), personal interview.
49 Ferguson, Laurie, (14th of March, 2016), personal interview.
Brodtmann, Gai, (21st of March, 2016), personal interview.
Singh, Lisa, (20th of April, 2016), personal interview.
“Well they’d have to say that, because it was a major call and it was a major fuck up. How stupid, they’ve put action on climate change in Australia back many, many years. They could have voted for it then, and I think Kevin Rudd would probably still be Prime Minister, and carbon price would have been in place for seven years by now, and the world would have kept going but our emissions would be going down. That was an unforgivable act of bastardry, there’s no two ways about that”.

Combet’s criticism spoke to a deeper Labor issue with Greens behaviour. From Labor’s perspective, voting against a legislation that, while flawed, improved environmental regulation indicated the problems inherent in Greens politics, and ‘movement parties’ more broadly. If consultation and industry support was necessary to initiate the infrastructure of carbon pricing, that was part of politics, and certainly better than the alternative. As Lisa Singh put it, “we all knew that it was a place to start and it could have been built on”, not the end point of climate policy. Labor MPs viewed the Greens decision as excessively purist, and one that ultimately harmed Australian environmentalism. Wong blamed it for much of what later unfolded:

“If the Greens had voted for the CPRS legislation when Tony Abbott became leader of the Liberal Party in 2009, a carbon price would have been introduced and by today would have been embedded in the Australian economy ... Instead the Greens voted with Tony Abbott. That vote has had disastrous consequences for Australia’s ability to effectively respond to climate change. The fact that the Coalition and the Greens joined forces to prevent the introduction of a carbon price, that Senator Milne was prepared to vote with Senator Cory Bernardi to defeat the CPRS, has had long lasting and negative consequences for climate action in Australia”.

Greens MPs did not necessarily reject this premise. As Lee Rhiannon characterised her approach to legislation, “you look at whether it’s overall an

50 Combet, Greg, (2nd of May, 2016), personal interview.
51 Singh, Lisa, (20th of April, 2016), personal interview.
52 Wong, Penny, (19th of August, 2016), personal correspondence.
improvement for people and the environment … sometimes you get a little bit, sometimes you get a big bit”\textsuperscript{53} They instead argued that the incrementalist logic did not apply to the CPRS. This was because, according to their analysis, the legislation’s details made later improvements unlikely. A common phrase was that the bill “locked in failure”:

“People often say ‘something is better than nothing’ but the answer to that was this wasn’t something. It was a negative. We obviously looked at it very closely, and part of that deal was massive compensation for the fossil fuel industry - and we got legal advice saying that, if the target increased, the compensation would have increased, which would have resulted in more money going to the fossil fuel industry”. \textsuperscript{54}

According to Rhiannon, the compensation meant future governments would not intensify the scheme as Labor suggested - it would make a change too costly. Bandt compared the case to other policy areas, which he considered more conducive to gradualism:

“It’s not like superannuation where, say, you want to get it to 12%, you might vote for a bill that puts it at 9% in the hope you can come back and increase it later - it wasn’t like that. It would have made it virtually impossible to lift the ambition to what the science required and would have locked in an extraordinary amount of compensation for polluters”. \textsuperscript{55}

While Labor MPs rejected this notion, suggesting that the pricing infrastructure represented the beginning of Australia’s climate policy, Greens figures claimed they had little choice but to vote against the bill. According to Hollo, environmental activists, the party’s original social base, also opposed the industry compensation and overall emissions targets:

“The vast majority of the environmental movement was passionately set against this legislation. So the idea that the Greens could turn around and support that legislation at the 11th and a half hour, simply to get it through

\textsuperscript{53} Rhiannon, Lee, (16th of March, 2016), personal interview.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Bandt, Adam, (15th of March, 2016), personal interview.
parliament … People talk about the CPRS being a Meg Lees, Democrats moment, but it’s completely the opposite - if the Greens turned around and supported that our base would have gone”. 56

More than any other moment in its political history, the Greens decision to oppose Labor’s CPRS continues to animate partisans in both groups. While an important piece of legislation itself, this resonance might also stem from its symbolic value. For both sides, the process illustrated the flaws in the other party’s underlying approach to politics. For Labor, it showed the essential naivety of Greens politics, when a party would rather hold out for perfection than support incremental progress; for the Greens, it showed how ‘catch all’ politics corrupted policy, when a party would rather neutralise hostile groups than produce targeted legislation. While Labor’s attempt to balance environmental and industrial interests was present, as well as parliamentary considerations in the Senate, these different models of political logic permeated the entire process. Two of Labor’s most pivotal choices - to pursue a bipartisan consensus, as well as consult extensively with industry - reflected this instinct. Both were opposed by the Greens. Within these two mentalities, the Greens opposition was either a “monumental fuck up”, or the only course available.

The Clean Energy Act (2010-2013)

After the Coalition and Greens voted against Rudd’s CPRS for the second time in late 2009, commentators speculated that Labor would dissolve parliament, seeking a fresh Senate at an early election. According to Karl Bitar, the party’s General Secretary, senior Labor ministers discussed the idea with Rudd - and the party’s administration even began planning for a campaign in January 2010. 57 But after the Prime Minister returned from a disappointing UN climate conference in Copenhagen, despondent and deflated, the party never pursued the dissolution. Instead, in the face of parliamentary opposition, Labor

56 Hollo, Tim, (16th of May, 2016), personal interview.
announced it would delay the scheme until 2012, in line with the next round of international negotiations.⁵⁸ When Rudd eventually lost the Labor leadership to Gillard in June, some drew a line between this decision and his sliding popularity. According to Tim Flannery, the prominent scientist and climate advocate, Rudd’s delay “devastated his moral authority”.⁵⁹

While Gillard immediately moved to renegotiate difficult issues for the party, particularly on mining taxation and refugee arrivals, Labor’s climate policy remained relatively stable at the 2010 election. If Wong thought bipartisan consensus was essential for lasting reform, the new Prime Minister emphasised the need for community support. As Gillard saw it, Labor’s legislation failed because of a gradual loss of consensus around emissions reduction.⁶⁰ Because of this, she vowed to precede any climate policy with a ‘citizens assembly’ - a deliberative body of 150 Australians, charged with researching and advising the government on climate change, with the goal of increasing social support for the reform.⁶¹ While the Greens rejected Labor’s idea - according to Milne, it was a mere “community gobfest” - the 2010 election again changed the parliamentary dynamic between the two parties.⁶² After the vote, Labor and the Greens now constituted a majority in the Senate, with Labor needing Greens support to form government in the House. According to Milne, the party’s leadership made a conscious decision to use this leverage for climate legislation. In the days following the election, the issue was central to negotiations:

“Julia Gillard went into that period with her ridiculous focus group [the citizen’s assembly] … But after the election, she wanted to form government, and Abbott was out there trying to form government as well. So we made it a condition of forming government that we have a carbon

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price, and the other condition was that it would be legislated and come into effect by the 1st of July 2012. The last bit was not written down in the agreement, because the second thing I asked for was a multi-party committee with experts that would deliver it. And if we made public that she had agreed for it to be legislated by the 1st of July 2012, it’s unlikely you would have gotten some of the independents, Windsor and Oakeshott, to come into that arrangement”.

In the Agreement’s final text, both parties agreed on the need to “tackle climate change”, accepting that “reducing climate pollution by 2020 will require a price on carbon”.

As Milne admitted, the document omitted the July 2012 deadline, something Gillard also later conceded. While Wayne Swan argued that the Agreement amounted to Greens penance for voting against the CPRS, with the new framework remaining essentially the same as Rudd’s, media figures generally presented it as a change of direction for the Labor government. According to disparate media organisations, the agreement involved “dumping” Gillard’s citizens assembly, in exchange for carbon pricing.

On top of the minority situation in the House, changes to the Senate also shifted federal climate politics. If Labor’s uneasy Senate position undermined the CPRS - without a clear path through the Greens, and otherwise needing ephemeral Coalition support - the vote provided a clearer route. With Abbott and the Coalition opposing carbon pricing, the Greens now represented Labor’s only viable partner in the Senate. According to Greens figures, relations between the two parties began to thaw in this new environment. They attributed part of this to personnel change. For Hollo, the shift started with the Prime Minister herself:

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63 Milne, Christine, (9th of August, 2016), personal interview.
66 Swan, Wayne, (10th of February, 2016), personal interview.
“The key difference was in leadership. Julia Gillard did and said a lot of things I disagreed with, but fundamentally Gillard was there to negotiate. She was willing to have a relationship of some kind, even if it wasn’t a particularly friendly one, on the basis of ‘we need this parliament to operate, we need this parliament to operate well, we need to work with you’. And that was an extraordinary situation coming out of the Rudd years”.  

Along with its new leader, Labor also promoted Greg Combet to cabinet, as the government’s new Minister for Climate Change. According to Combet, Gillard chose him because of his history at the Australian Council of Trade Unions, knowing success would depend on multi-directional compromise. Milne observed these qualities. In her experience, Combet facilitated a professional relationship between offices, despite lingering policy differences. “Greg Combet and I got on very well during the whole carbon price negotiations”, she said. “We respected one another’s positions, we knew we were never going to agree on some things, but it was always very hard argued in a really respectful way”. Combet’s office returned this picture of a healthy working relationship. The Minister’s chief of staff, Alan Behm, recalled sharing the occasional “glass of wine and beer” with Milne’s office, “all in the interest on delivering on the deal that allowed Gillard to govern”. Behm found himself respecting Milne “enormously”, an opinion Combet shared:

“I got to enjoy my dealings with Christine Milne. She’s a believer in her cause, I respect her … She was a very capable leader for the Greens, and certainly very capable in those negotiations - and tough, so I respected that. We had good civil relations, but forthright exchanges”.

Along with improved rapport, the new political environment also introduced mechanisms for producing the legislation. Where Greens figures complained about their lack of access to ministers during the CPRS debate, the ‘Agreement’

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68 Hollo, Tim, (16th of May, 2016), personal interview.
69 Combet, Greg, (2nd of May, 2016), personal interview.
70 Milne, Christine, (9th of August, 2016), personal interview.
71 Behm Allan, (2015), No, minister: so you want to be a chief of staff?, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p.112.
72 Combet, Greg, (2nd of May, 2016), personal interview.
established institutions to facilitate dialogue. Most significantly, it promised a ‘multi party climate change committee’ (MPCCC), with Labor, Greens and independent MPs. The committee was designed to “consult, negotiate, and report to Cabinet … on agreed options for the implementation of a carbon price in Australia”.\(^{73}\) It hired experts to counsel members, providing a forum for each to express opinions and concerns. According to Christine Milne, the committee was central to the policy’s ultimate success:

“I think it was critical and I said to Gillard when we negotiated the agreement to form government - I said to her “we need to do it with a multi party climate committee and we need to bring in experts.” And that was from my experience in Tasmania, because that’s how I succeeded in getting gay law reform. Because you need experts in the room to create the space for people to change their minds … If you just sit politicians down they have their own position, it makes it nigh on impossible for them to change. So how do you actually break that? You break it by bringing in the experts who know what they’re talking about. And then when one party says “we want this”, the expert says “yes, but if you have that, this will be the perverse outcome - have you thought about doing it this way”? And so on and so forth, until you reach a position where it creates the space for people to change their mind”.\(^{74}\)

The independent MPs also generally supported the committee process, with Windsor “congratulating” Gillard for “going down the MPCCC path”.\(^{75}\) According to Behm, the committee’s value rested on its ability to both express and build on shared principles:

“If you get people together, and you work out what your starting point is going to be, you have a much higher likelihood of success in delivering a workable policy. And whatever one says about the Cleaning Energy Future package, it was workable policy … But in all of the circumstances, the

\(^{74}\) Milne, Christine, (9th of August, 2016), personal interview.
multi-party committee was actually able to deliver very soundly based complex policy in a very short time”. 76

Behm placed great emphasis on this shared “starting point”. He considered its fundamental to the second term’s policy success. Making a distinction between “values” and “ideology” - the former indicating principles and social goals; the latter suggesting tribal loyalties and institutional interests - Behm argued that joint values allowed groups to overcome sectarian division and institutional hostility. Because of this, one of Combet’s first acts as Minister was to outline them with the committee members:

“The moment there was agreement around those principles, we knew that we had won the day. We knew it couldn’t be undone, because we could always force the argument back to principles. So our solution to that sectarian dispute was to have an agree set of principles from the beginning - and it was done consciously”. 77

While the committee improved dialogue between Labor and the Greens, certain fundamental differences did remain. Two specific questions divided the parties. These involved the starting price, as well as transitional assistance to heavy industry. On pricing, the Greens advocated a higher initial figure than Labor, modelled on maintaining the atmospheric carbon level at 350 to 450 parts per million. This reflected the party’s more aggressive vision of emissions reduction, moving in tandem with a lower overall ‘cap’ in the trading scheme. 78 For Labor figures, however, this starting price was too large, too unilateral, and would carry serious economic consequences; particularly for industrial communities, currently dependent on fossil fuels, with legitimate fears about their immediate future. Combet described the Greens stance as an ‘obsession’, reflecting its “all or nothing attitude”. 79 Labor advocated a price reflecting a 5-15% reduction target by 2020, while the Greens supported a 25-40% fall.

76 Behm, Allan, (12th of October 2016), personal interview.
77 Ibid.
78 Milne, Christine, (9th of August, 2016), personal interview.
According to representatives from both parties, this represented an ‘impasse’ for the committee. As Combet put it, “we were simply not be able to agree with the Greens on the level of targeted emissions reductions by 2020”.80 This time, however, the two found a way to break the deadlock - producing a compromise that both parties could accept, at least initially. Labor’s legislation was built around an emissions trading scheme, instituting a floating price that traced supply and demand in the permits market. To gain Greens support, Combet offered to precede this plan with a three year ‘fixed’ price, along with an independent statutory body that would eventually recommend emissions targets to government. According to Milne, this satisfied some of the Greens concerns:

“The fight was over Australia’s level of ambition into the future. Labor was sticking with 5%, we were there with 25-40%, and how do you breach that? So it was agreed that we would have a fixed price for three years, based on their 550 parts per million trajectory, the $23 to $25 scenario. And we would set up the Climate Change Authority - which would be setup to determine, based on the science, what Australia’s ambition should be”. 81

Labor MPs later expressed regret over this compromise. While the CPRS also involved a limited fixed price - of one year, rather than three - the new scheme was judged by many commentators to contradict Gillard’s election position, that there would be “no carbon tax under the government I lead”.82 This became the central motif of Tony Abbott’s opposition to the Gillard government, which Labor MPs conceded cost it “skin” over the next two years.83 A number explicitly linked this to Green demands. As Combet admitted, “the flaw in this approach was political … and it prove to be a monumental flaw”.84

The second, related disagreement between the parties covered industry assistance. This reflected a classic jobs versus the environment conundrum,

80 Ibid, p.251.
81 Milne, Christine, (9th of August, 2016), personal interview.
83 Brodtmann, Gai, (21st of March, 2016), personal interview.
particularly around the immediate future of the coal industry. As Ged Kearney, the President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, admitted, this was one policy where an otherwise sympathetic Greens party clashed with organised labour:

“It’s one area where at times I’ve felt a little bit let down by the Greens. Because we very much want to support the environment sector, and moving beyond the carbon based economy, but there was never a recognition from them that it was going to be difficult for the union movement, given the number of people that work in the carbon intensive industries” 85

According to Kearney, the union movement broadly supported measures to reduce emissions - the ACTU and CFMEU both agreed that a carbon price was necessary to combat climate change - but its priorities and concerns did not align perfectly with the Greens.86 In Combet’s mind, the two parties began with different motivations, especially on the nature and timeline of transition. In his experience, the Greens supported a much more rapid shift away from fossil fuels than Labor:

“The worst thing for me was their unwillingness to really engage with the need to transition things like steel plants - like the Port Kembla steel works, or the Whyalla steel works. Or the aluminium industry, or the fertiliser sector, or the cement making sector. Very large industries in Australia are extremely emissions intensive and any carbon pricing scheme will have a profound impact on them … And we were proposing to do something quite rigorous, and place a carbon price on those industries, but give those industries significant relief from the cost burden, upfront, and then to phase that protection down over many years. It’s the only way it can be practically done, but the Greens wouldn’t get their hands dirty - they didn’t want to offer any protection”.87

85 Kearney, Ged, (14th of April, 2016), personal interview.
86 Ibid.
87 Combet, Greg, (2nd of May, 2016), personal interview
The conflict between these positions reached another impasse in May, when the committee met across a weekend to “thrash out” differences over assistance to the coal industrial. While Milne opposed aid to coal generators, John Pierce, the chair of the Australian Energy Market Commission, told the meeting that, without it, the country risked energy insecurity and disruption. The Greens challenged Pierce’s findings - according to Milne, it reflected the “extreme conservatism” of energy market interests - but Labor accepted the advice of the statutory authority, refusing to oppose its independent counsel. While the Greens leader later accused Pierce of providing misleading and invested testimony, the minor party begrudgingly accepted the situation. The government's eventual package included similar assistance to the CPRS, with even more going to coal, and the Greens signed up to the deal. Labor MPs presented this as proof of the Greens mistake in 2009 - as Penny Wong put it, “two years later they voted for Labor’s Clean Energy Package which included a higher level of assistance” - but their acquiescence provided the necessary consensus for the bill to proceed. If Labor compromised on the fixed price, the Greens did so on industry assistance.

Alongside the carbon price, the final “clean energy package” also included measures to support renewable energy. It established the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, a ‘green bank’ with $10 billion to invest in encouraging ventures, as well as the Australian Renewable Energy Agency, itself managing $3.2 billion of funding. Both institutions were strongly supported by the Greens. By the time Labor introduced this package to parliament in September 2011, political lines were much clearer than they were two years earlier. A vocally resistant Coalition now opposed the broadly supportive Labor and Greens parties. In parliament, Tony Abbott attacked the bill, dismissing it as “a bad tax based on a lie”. Opposition MPs challenged the urgency of emissions reduction,

89 Milne, Christine, (9th of August, 2016), personal interview.
90 Milne, Christine, (9th of August, 2016), personal interview.
91 Wong, Penny, (19th of August, 2016), personal correspondence.
suggesting that Australia could achieve little in the context of larger, developing neighbours.94 Even if it did possess an environmental rationale, they argued, carbon pricing would burden local industry, jeopardising Australian jobs.95 Underlying all of this, Abbott claimed, was the political left’s antipathy towards economic markets:

“Deep in the DNA of every Labor member opposite, I regret to say, is an instinct for higher taxes and greater regulation. And isn't that just what we are getting under this carbon tax proposal—more taxes, more bureaucrats, more regulation, more burdens on the life of the Australian people and more economic pain for no environmental gain whatsoever?”96

On each of these points, Labor and the Greens diverged from the Coalition. The two left parties were much more willing to accept the limits of market organisation, with Mark Dreyfus describing climate change as “greatest market failure the world has ever seen”. This was the point of introducing a carbon price, he argued, to provide “powerful signal to the market that the emissions of harmful carbon dioxide into the atmosphere can no longer occur without consequences”.97 Their representatives also rejected the Coalition’s narrow conception of responsibility. As Anthony Albanese argued, Australia could not procrastinate and avoid the ramifications of climate change, nor was that an ethical choice:

“Labor is not prepared to ignore the threat, ignore the science and ignore the economists. We cannot say that this is someone else’s problem. We all share the one planet; we are all citizens of the world. It would simply not be fair to leave it to our children and grandchildren to deal with the consequences of our inaction. If we do nothing, dangerous climate change will impact on this and future generations”.98

95 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
While the two parties did emphasise different things - with Greens MPs expressing disappointment with parts of the bill, like its weak coverage of transport; and Labor MPs reassuring voters that it would only marginally impact industry - they both shared this fundamental concern about climate change and its threat. Where the Coalition was skeptical, at times even dismissive, Labor and the Greens perceived a problem that demanded state action. And with their joint majority in the Senate, along with the support of independents in the House, the two parties now possessed the parliamentary strength to legislate it. On the 8th of November, 2011, four years after Kevin Rudd’s election, the Clean Energy Act passed the Senate. In Gillard’s words, the government had “made history … after all those years of debate and division, our nation has got the job done”.

Conclusion

Throughout the intricate history of carbon pricing under Rudd and Gillard, the ‘jobs versus the environment’ dilemma played a significant role. Conflicting impulses, particularly around the pace of economic change, meant Labor and the Greens often approached legislation from different directions. As Greg Combet framed it, “because [Greens politicians] emphasise the environment above all else, that brings them into conflict with Labor’s values about the economy, the distribution of wealth and jobs, from time to time”. The ‘dilemma’ shaped negotiations over industry assistance, as well as the scheme’s starting price, something that Labor, Greens and union leaders all admitted. Beneath this clash of interests, however, was a deeper disagreement about politics and social change. Especially under Rudd, the electoralist and movement instincts of each party were clear. Pursuing consensus through bipartisan negotiation, industry consultation and an ill-fated ‘citizens assembly’, Labor figures argued that sustainable legislation required broad support and the aggregation of diverse interests. The Greens rejected this model. As they saw it, it was electorally motivated and environmentally weak, only able to produce

100 Combet, Greg, (2nd of May, 2016), personal interview.
“something that fossil fuel interests could live with”. They voted against Wong’s legislation because, in their eyes, it possessed insufficient scope and ambition.

But while this presented a pessimistic picture of Labor and Greens relations, the government’s second term suggested that, even with these differences, agreement on environmental questions was still possible. Between 2009 and 2011, three things changed, facilitating a more productive relationship. Firstly, the shifting state of parliament meant that Labor now required Greens support to govern in the House of Representatives, while also offering it a clearer route through the Senate. This increased the minor party’s leverage, which it used to promote climate policy. Secondly, in this new parliamentary environment, personal relations between office improved. Both Labor and Greens representatives spoke of a respectful, professional association, as did their staff. Thirdly, the ‘Agreement’ introduced institutions facilitating dialogue between different parliamentary interests. The ‘Multi Party Committee on Climate Change’ provided a formal channel for each to express their concerns and opinions, as well as a forum for negotiation. In this context, both parties accepted a greater degree of compromise than in 2009; Labor on the starting price, the Greens on industry assistance. While debates continue within Labor over the wisdom of this deal - with many judging it an electoral failure, in light of earlier promises - it allowed the government to pass significant, historic legislation.

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101 Rice, Janet, (11th of April, 2016), personal interview.
CHAPTER SIX
Asylum seekers and refugee politics, 2007-2013

In September 2001, with asylum seekers occupying the centre of national debate, the Australian Labor leader, Kim Beazley, complained that the Coalition Government was ‘wedging’ his party on the issue.\(^1\) Beazley was referring to John Howard’s response to the MV Tampa - a Norwegian freighter which, having rescued 438 stranded asylum seekers in international waters, now sought landing in Australia - and his government’s ensuing rhetoric and policy agenda. Howard refused to take the ship, famously stating that “[Australia] will decide who comes into this country and the circumstances in which they come”.\(^2\) In the weeks following the incident, the Coalition government introduced a set of policies designed to stop refugee boats arriving in Australia: the redefinition of the Australian ‘migration zone’, the interception of vessels by the Australian Navy, and the transfer of asylum seekers to detention centres in Nauru and Papua New Guinea.\(^3\) Collectively, the policies became known as the ‘Pacific solution’.

As Beazley admitted, these developments presented an electoral as well as moral dilemma for the Labor Party. It was a wedge, in his words, designed to push its two edges apart. According to Lindsay Tanner, the Member for Melbourne, this was because refugee politics accentuated tensions between different, but equally necessary social groups within the Labor Party:

“We have an enormous problem with the growing division in Labor's support base between traditional working-class and educated middle-class voters. John Howard has exploited this division ruthlessly. Labor's failure at this election is partly attributable to its inability to hold together these increasingly divergent interests around a single political theme”.\(^4\)

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\(^2\) Marr, David and Wilkinson, Marion, (2003), *Dark Victory*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney..
Tanner’s analysis mirrored the conclusions of international studies on the politics of immigration and social democratic parties. Like the post material literature, this research often identified different cleavages shaping party conflict and the potentially disruptive effect when one undermined another. As Tanner acknowledged, social democratic parties felt conflicted about refugee control and migration policy because two constituencies often possessed different preferences. While scholars debated the cause of this - did schooling drive attitudes, or did they follow labour market positions? - cross-national studies suggested that educated and middle class citizens were generally more supportive of migration and cultural diversity than working class voters. As a result, “the electoral politics of immigration posed an ideological and strategic dilemma to Socialist and Social Democratic parties”:

“This has to do with the mixed preferences of the mainstream Left electorate. On the one hand, these parties cater to voters with high income and/or education, liberal socio-cultural values and an inclination towards a concept of social egalitarianism and solidarity that is defined in universalist – and not nationalist – terms. On the other hand, these parties cater to working-class voters who are net beneficiaries of redistribution and feel increasingly threatened by economic globalisation … With its electorate divided and immigration growing more relevant on the public agenda, in the face of an extremist challenge from the Right and the growth of green and other small parties on the Left, Socialists and Social Democrats find themselves in a particularly vulnerable position”.

Studies of single countries usually identified a similar dynamic. In Germany, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) has largely avoided the immigration and refugee debate - being “reserved, even reluctant” to engage with it - in an attempt to suppress any tension it might bring the party’s electoral coalition. Since the rise of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), the British Labour Party has followed a more explicitly nationalist path - hardening its stance on

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immigration, reflecting an internal debate over what Bale called its “beer drinking” and “wine drinking” constituencies.\(^8\)

While these studies largely focused on the “siphoning” of votes to parties of the centre and hard right, others acknowledged the second side of Beazley’s wedge. If social democratic parties aligned themselves with the more cautious, nationalist politics associated with working class preferences, they also risked alienating more universalist, progressive parts of their electoral coalition. This especially applied to Greens parties, who often seek to exploit this vulnerability. As European studies show, one of the defining traits of Greens parties is their support for multiculturalism and the rights of migrants. Alongside environmentalism and cultural libertarianism, “Greens voters distinguish themselves from other parties due to their ... pro immigration attitudes”.\(^9\) When approaching questions of regional integration and national borders, these same voters are more likely to justify their position using “multiculturalist-universalist arguments” than supporters of other parties.\(^10\) In Germany, and in contrast to the SPD’s relative silence, “the Green Party … have positioned themselves discursively as the main advocates for immigrants’ rights and demands for equitable inclusion”.\(^11\) This reflected the sentiments of the party’s demographic base, which supported a form of post material cultural liberalism. As Schmidtke put it, “the liberal urban middle class that is widely in favour of a multicultural society tends to vote for the Greens and their substantiated pledge to include migrants more actively in their party”.\(^12\)

On this level, immigration politics traces the post material cleavage relatively cleanly. It raises cultural questions, while potentially challenging the relationship between working class voters and social democratic parties. This picture,

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\(^12\) Ibid, p.410.
however, requires a few qualifications. The first is that immigration policy is not completely detached from the traditional material partisan cleavage. As Perez and Alberto's note, inflows of new residents can influence economic classes differently:

“Just as trade policy has winners and losers, immigration most often weakens the labor market position of native low-skilled workers while improving the economic outlook of high skilled workers or professionals”.13

From this angle, working class skepticism towards immigration can be as much a statement of economic interest as ethnic and cultural preference. While also built on racism and ethnic prejudice, this was one of the main reasons behind the union movement’s historic support for the ‘White Australia’ policy.14 Modern cross-national studies of attitudes towards immigration also generally suggest this dynamic. In wealthy countries, “individuals with high levels of skill are more likely to be pro-immigration” than those with lower levels.15

The second complicating factor is that immigrants themselves are more likely to vote for social democratic parties than native born citizens, as well as being likely to occupy working class status. While scholars suggest a number of explanations for this voting pattern - linking it to class interests, to collective identity, to personal experiences of discrimination - studies find that “immigrants and ethnic minorities in Western democracies consistently vote for social-democratic parties”16. This is the case in the UK, Germany and the United States.17 As Zingher and Thomas found, it is also true of Australia:

“Immigrants from non-English-speaking (NESB) countries are, ceteris paribus, more likely to vote for Labor than the English-speaking immigrant and native-born populations (roughly 20 per cent more likely). Immigrants from English speaking countries are significantly more likely than the native-born population to support Labor, but the magnitude of the difference is much smaller than the gap between NESB and the native population”.

These structural concerns - suggesting an important, if complicated, post material dilemma for the ALP - provides some of the backdrop to refugee politics in the Rudd and Gillard governments. Echoing the Howard years, the processing of asylum seekers remained a live and disputed policy area under Labor, as well as a central point of conflict between the government and the Greens. This chapter analyses asylum seeker politics across these six years, a period involving two clear stages - Labor’s initial termination of Howard’s Pacific solution, and then its subsequent support for deterrence and reintroduction of offshore detention. The chapter is interested in why, after the first stage, Labor and the Greens diverged so widely - and why it then became a site of such partisan antagonism.

Interviewing MPs from both parties, the chapter suggests the acrimony over refugee politics reflected two layers of contention. The first was a policy debate over the nature of deaths at sea, as well as the role of deterrence in stopping them - though both parties presented very different accounts of this disagreement. The second layer reflected Labor’s post material dilemma, as well as each party’s broader approach to politics, parliament and elections. Labor MPs were conscious of the electoral tension boat arrivals produced, creating what Julia Gillard called a ‘dual constituency issue’, making the party more sensitive than the Greens to their continued presence. The Greens, on the other hand, rejected the mentality implicit within Labor’s dilemma, claiming it

embodied a form of amoral catch all politics, where electoral considerations trumped principles and humanitarianism.

A cooperative first year: ending Pacific detention (2007-2008)

In November 2008, nearing the first anniversary of Kevin Rudd’s election, the Labor government’s Minister for Immigration, Chris Evans, gave a speech to the Refugee Council of Australia. For Evans, the talk was a chance to reflect and quietly celebrate, a testament to “how much has been achieved in terms of returning humanity and fairness to Australia’s refugee policies”. As the Minister told it, Labor’s first year in power embodied a new paradigm, one prioritising compassion and efficiency over the Coalition’s instinct to “punish refugees for domestic political purposes”. As proof of this new direction, Evans pointed to changes he had made to the regime he inherited from Howard -- the abolition of Temporary Protection Visas, the expedition of legal processing for long term detainees and, most significantly of all, the closing of Pacific detention centres in Nauru and Manus Island.

While the Refugee Council offered Evans a sympathetic audience, Labor’s opposition to important planks of the Pacific Solution developed publically, if unevenly, in the years preceding Rudd’s 2007 election. As early as 2002, Julia Gillard, then Labor’s immigration spokesperson, announced Labor’s opposition to the Manus Island and Nauru detention centres - while nonetheless still supporting mandatory incarceration on Australia’s Christmas Island. The party maintained this position at the 2004 election, despite internal challenges at Labor’s national conference (members of the party’s left, led by ALP president Dr Carmen Lawrence, supported an end to mandatory detention altogether - a bid that ultimately failed). The same stance remained largely intact through to

2007. In an interview with the ABC’s 730 Report just three days before his
election, Kevin Rudd confirmed that Labor policy was to close these detention
centres “at a very early stage”, rejecting the Pacific Solution as “just wrong”.\textsuperscript{22}

When Labor did come to office in late 2007, the Pacific Solution was a husk of
its former self. At the program’s peak in 2002, Manus Island and Nauru housed
over 1500 refugees. By early 2008, they hosted less than 100.\textsuperscript{23} In this context,
Chris Evans’ decision to resettle the remaining asylum seekers on Nauru was not
as radical as it might have been six years earlier. But it still meant the closure of
Nauru as a detention facility, and an effective end to the Pacific architecture.
Evans was happy to boast of the achievement. “The Pacific solution was a costly,
cynical and ultimately unsuccessful exercise”, he stated. “The Rudd Government
pledged to dismantle it and we have moved quickly on that front”.\textsuperscript{24}

As Evans outlined, Labor’s first criticism of the Pacific regime was its price.
From its announcement of opposition in 2002 onwards, the party emphasised
the profligacy of overseas detention. Gillard dismissed it at the time as a “costly
farce”.\textsuperscript{25} While not the most publicly contested or impassioned dimension of
refugee policy, the question of expense remained prominent throughout Labor’s
critique. This was enhanced by NGO reports suggesting that it had cost Australia
more than $1 billion to process just 1700 refugees.\textsuperscript{26} During the 2007 election
campaign, Rudd reiterates the complaint. “The so-called Pacific Solution has
cost the taxpayer hundreds of millions of dollars … why not use Christmas
Island instead?”.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{22} Insiders, (2004), ‘Labor wants Pacific solution scrapped: Smith’, \textit{Australian Broadcasting Corporation}, 7th of
\textsuperscript{24} UNHCR, (2008), ‘UNHCR welcomes close of the Australia’s Pacific solution’, press release,
\textsuperscript{25} Evans, Chris, (2008), ‘Last refugees leave Nauru’, Press release, Department of Immigration
and Citizenship, 8th of February 2008, [online]
http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p?query=Id%3A%2Fmedia%2Fpressrel%2FYUNP6%22
\textsuperscript{26} Taylor, Kerry and Forbes, Mark, (2002), ‘Pacific Solution refugees in Australia’, \textit{The Age}, 31st
\textsuperscript{27} Oxfam Australia, (2007), ‘A price too high: the cost of Australia’s approach to asylum
seekers’, August 2007, [online] http://resources.oxfam.org.au/filestore/originals/OAus-
PriceTooHighAsylumSeekers-0807.pdf
Labor’s second reason for change was more principled, certainly more contentious. From the system’s inception in 2001, opponents of Pacific detention labelled the practice ‘cruel’ or ‘inhumane’. Labor’s 2002 policy stated that it needed to end the regime “as a matter of principle”. In a 2006 essay published in The Monthly magazine, Kevin Rudd compared the Pacific Solution to the biblical parable of the Good Samaritan, and its “injunction to care for the stranger in our midst”. Because Howard’s policy outsourced processing obligations to other countries, Rudd argued it abdicated responsibility and was therefore “cause for ethical concern”. This moral opposition expressed itself in the government’s decision to abolish Temporary Protection Visas, a class of visa Howard introduced in 1999. Rather than permanent settlement, the visas granted genuine refugees three years of asylum, with restricted access to services. Evans announced the change in May 2008:

“The Temporary Protection visa was one of the worst aspects of the Howard government’s punitive treatment of refugees, many of whom had suffered enormously before fleeing to Australia … The scrapping of the TPV fulfils the Rudd Government’s commitment to providing refugees with a fair and certain outcome”.

This principled objection was part of a deeper progressive critique of the nation’s refugee policy made by activists, intellectuals and organisations, demanding that Australia take its moral and legal responsibilities towards asylum seekers and non-citizens more seriously. Public intellectuals like David Marr and Julian Burnside described the processing regime as inhumane and xenophobic, designed primarily to benefit the conservative government electorally.

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http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p?query=Id%3A%22media%2Fpressrel%2F4JGQ6%22
same vein, non government organisations like Amnesty International argued that extended Pacific detention was a cruel, stunting influence, neglecting the rights and aspirations of asylum seekers, and therefore needed to change.\textsuperscript{32} TPVs and Nauru and Manus Island were at the centre of this critique. If John Howard asserted a dichotomy between national sovereignty and humanitarian obligations, progressive critics rejected the overriding priority given to local authority.

On both Pacific detention and temporary protection visas, the Greens largely agreed with Labor’s early trajectory under Evans. Since refugee policy entered the foreground of Australian politics, sailing in with the Tampa in 2001, the party’s position had been relatively clear. Across the interviews, Greens representatives uniformly considered the Howard era inhumane, a toxic period in Australian history, with Pacific detention a clear abuse of human rights. For Sarah Hanson-Young, a Senator elected in 2007 who later assumed responsibility for immigration, the changes were necessary and pressing. She remembered Chris Evans’ tenure as a positive time for refugee politics. While the change to temporary protection did not require a parliamentary vote, Hanson-Young was encouraged by the shift, as well as other reforms to the system Labor inherited from Howard:

“It was a welcome change. I was very happy to see temporary protection visas go … The first bill I voted on actually was the removal of the detention debts, which was for me, as someone who had worked as an activist in this space, a really important thing to have done - people who were found to be genuine refugees were no longer being saddled with $150,000 to $200,000 worth of debt”.\textsuperscript{33}

Hanson-Young respected Evans as a Minister, as well the broad direction he outlined in his Refugee Council speech. She was more suspicious, however, of the wider parliamentary Labor Party’s commitment to the issue. Other Greens

\textsuperscript{33} Hanson Young, Sarah, (10th of October, 2016), personal interview.
representatives also expressed this concern, linking their trepidation to Labor’s cautious response to the Tampa incident under Kim Beazley.\textsuperscript{34} According to Hanson-Young, Labor’s leadership placed refugee policy towards the bottom of their list of legislative priorities. Further reforms were needed, but were not seen as urgent by the government. This led to delays which, in her view, carried long-term implications for asylum seekers:

“I think Chris Evans was a remarkable immigration minister, and I think he had a lot of good things he wanted to do. If he had more support in the Labor Party, I think we would have got time limits on detention, and I think we would have had proper oversight of what happens when children are involved. If we had managed to get those things done, we wouldn’t be in the mess we are now”.\textsuperscript{35}

Hanson Young’s disquiet flowed from underlying differences between Greens and Labor politicians, at this point latent. While Labor did make genuine changes to the refugee regime under Evans, the parliamentary party never relinquished the rhetoric or architecture of border security. While part of its left faction wanted Labor reject it openly, hoping to abolish mandatory detention altogether, Rudd never allowed the pendulum to swing this far back as leader. On the eve of the 2007 election, Rudd told The Australian newspaper that he believed in an “orderly immigration system … [and] you cannot have anything that is orderly if you allow people who do not have a lawful visa in the country to roam free”.\textsuperscript{36} This meant being willing to turn boats around, sending them back to their origin if deemed seaworthy. As Evans put it, the government was primarily concerned with “sweeping away past excesses”.\textsuperscript{37} The government also committed itself to another important feature of Howard’s border regime: the excision of Christmas Island and Ashmore Reef (meaning that asylum seekers arriving on these islands

\textsuperscript{34} Rice, Janet, (11th of April, 2016), personal interview.
\textsuperscript{35} Hanson Young, Sarah, (10th of October, 2016), personal interview.
could not seek protection under Australia’s Migration Act.\textsuperscript{38} As a backdrop to these decisions, Labor amplified its opposition to the ‘people smuggling’ trade. In his first ‘National Security Statement’ to the Australian Parliament, Rudd announced extra funding to combat the practice in cooperation with regional partners:

“The Government is committed to deploying all necessary resources to prosecute those criminals who seek to undermine Australia’s border security. We will work with our partners in the region to shut down the illegal operations of people smugglers and see them put in jail where they belong”.\textsuperscript{39}

Where Labor’s rhetoric attempted to balance sovereignty and humanitarian responsibilities, border security and human rights, the Australian Greens were far less conflicted. Since 2001, the Greens offered a direct and consistent critique of the nation’s policy trajectory. Writing at the time, Robert Manne, an academic and public intellectual whose commentary condemned the Coalition’s refugee regime, argued that “if there is any hope for the emergence of an oppositional politics, at the time of the Howard ascendancy, it now lies with the Greens”.\textsuperscript{40} Of all the parliamentary parties at the 2001 election (with Beazley’s Labor initially supporting Howard’s Tampa decision, and the Democrats deliberately “treading softly”) the Greens were “the only clear and unambiguous opponent of the government policy on asylum seekers”.\textsuperscript{41} From the beginning, the Greens rejected Howard’s new Pacific regime. Bob Brown denounced the offshore detention centres as “barbaric”, “more akin to the penal colony policies of two centuries ago than something you would expect in a modern democracy”\textsuperscript{42}. In Parliament, the party demanded its abolition. In a motion to the Senate on the


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first anniversary of the Tampa affair, Senator Kerry Nettle “[called] on the Government to abandon the ‘Pacific Solution’, which is designed to avoid Australia’s international responsibilities”.43

But while the Greens shared Labor’s aversion to Nauru and Manus Island, their particular critique went further. Like some members of Labor’s left, the party advocated an end to the broader system of mandatory detention - whether in Pacific nations or at Australia’s Christmas Island. Brown argued that, until Australia abolished the practice, it could not “hold its head up as a proud, warm-hearted humanitarian nation”.44 After suggesting a similar policy in 2002, the Greens promoted legislation in 2005 that would accelerate offshore processing, while releasing refugees that posed no risk into community housing. Senator Nettle, by then the party’s primary spokesperson on immigration, conceded that even this was a compromise:

“The Australian Greens believe mandatory detention should be ended so we can return to a system of assessing asylum claims while applicants live in the community. These bills do not go that far but they are a big step in the right direction”.45

This more aggressive policy position was matched by more aggressive rhetoric. The Greens supported Labor’s dismantling of Pacific detention, but they were generally more willing to denounce the system in explicitly moral language. Howard’s policies were “barbaric”, “inhumane”, “a shameful episode in Australia’s history”. The party also placed far less credence than Labor in the logic of border security. Senator Nettle flatly rejected the claim that deterrence was necessary for border protection - “the truth is that asylum seekers do not present any threat to our borders or our society”.46 But while these differences would prove significant in later years - especially the different emphases on

46  Ibid.
sovereignty, border security and international citizenship - Labor and the Greens agreed enough to cooperate during Kevin Rudd’s first year in government. Across 2008, the relationship was relatively smooth and effective. Both parties believed that the Pacific Solution was wasteful and inhumane, and supported its ultimate abolition.

The cracking of consensus: the ‘Malaysia solution’ (2009-2012)

When Chris Evans spoke to the Refugee Council in late 2008, discussing Labor’s dismantling of Pacific detention, very few unauthorised boats had made it to Australia under his watch. Just 161 asylum seekers arrived during Labor’s first year in government. If this offered the Minister a level of political tranquillity, it was disrupted by what Peter Mares called the “fifth wave” of unauthorised people movement, a new surge of arrivals in the early months of 2009. By April, more refugees were being taken to Christmas Island in a single month than in the entire previous year. On the 16th of April, this upswing was punctuated by tragedy, when a boat escorted by the Australian Navy exploded on its way to Christmas Island. Five asylum seekers died and the remaining 49 were injured.

All sides of Parliament mourned the tragedy – with Rudd stating that people smugglers deserved to “rot in hell” - but the deaths also provoked a partisan reaction. Sharman Stone, the Liberal Party’s spokesperson for Immigration,

48 Mares, Peter, (2009), ‘The fifth wave’, Inside Story, 21st of April 2009, [online]
http://insidestory.org.au/the-fifth-wave
attributed the increase to Labor policy under Evans. “You can't slash funds, you can't take your eye off the ball, you can't announce a softer policy”, she argued, “and then expect people not to lose their lives through people smuggling efforts”. The leader of the opposition, Malcolm Turnbull, argued that the abolition TPVs meant Labor had “abandoned our tough policies … and there has been a dramatic increase in boat arrivals”. While Turnbull and Stone’s reactions echoed arguments from the Howard era, they represented a change in emphasis for the party in opposition. Since losing government, the Coalition’s position on Labor’s refugee reforms was characterised more by ambivalence and acquiescence than defiance. When Chris Evans closed the Nauru detention centre, its then spokesperson, Senator Chris Ellison, posed objections, but the Liberal leader, Brendan Nelson, did not himself raise them publicly, nor turn them into a loud partisan cause. Later in 2008, when the Parliament’s Joint Standing Committee on Migration released its report on asylum processing (‘Immigration detention in Australia: a new beginning’) Stone sided with Labor in supporting its majority findings. The report admitted that “prior to the election of the current government … too many people spent years in immigration detention”, and recommended a new twelve month processing limit for detainees who posed no ongoing risk to the community.

This Coalition stance, more vocal and combative, ran parallel with the increasingly visible ‘fifth wave’ of refugee arrivals in Australia. In April 2009, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) noted a rise in regional asylum claims, particularly from Sri Lanka. According to Tony Burke, this also corresponded with a strategic shift within the people movement trade:

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“The actions of people smugglers changed - they actually changed in 2008, at the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka. It was at that point we needed to change our policy settings because they changed, but we didn’t. With Sri Lanka, for example, you had people actively marketing to people who knew they were not refugees, that you could pay, you could get there and get work rights in Australia - and even if you ended up getting sent back, you’d get to work in Australia for four or five years, just working your way through the system. It was a way in for work and remittance being sent back home, that was the advice we received at the time … So you had people in these situations mixed up with people who were genuine refugees”.

The increase in arrivals and the re-emergence of refugee politics was illuminated in October, again by a boat - the MV Oceanic Viking. Having rescued 78 Sri Lankans in Indonesian waters, the Viking ferried the refugees to an Indonesian processing centre in Bitan. When they reached the island, the asylum seekers refused to disembark, demanding the ship instead take them to Christmas Island for processing by Australian authorities. Like the April explosion, the ensuing standoff exposed the policy’s hardening partisan divisions. Kevin Rudd promised that his government was pursuing negotiations with “infinite patience”, even as the stalemate lingered for a number of weeks. According to Rudd at the time, Labor’s strategy was shaped by its overriding commitment to border security:

“When it comes to Australia's border protection policy, let me be absolutely clear that that policy of ours, in the Australian national interest, will not be changed in response to any protests, any threats, any threats of harm, any threats of self-harm. We will take as long as it takes to resolve this matter and any other matters into the future”.

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57 Burke, Tony, (10th of February, 2016), personal interview.
Rudd’s staunch, aggressive response to the boat arrival created the first serious division between his government and the Greens. The minor party disagreed with his language, his emphasis on border protection, and his refusal to immediately accept the Viking passengers to Australia. As the saga dragged on, and the Oceanic Viking’s fate remained uncertain, Greens politicians began to openly question Labor’s commitment to refugee welfare. For Hanson-Young, it was a turning point for the Rudd government:

“I distinctly remember the Oceanic Viking - I was on Christmas Island, a number of people had arrived by boat, and they were in this indefinite situation. I was coming back via Darwin - I was doing an inspection of the Darwin detention centre - and there was the footage of the Oceanic Viking, and there was Kevin Rudd standing up and saying that ‘people smugglers were the scum of the earth’. And that was it, that was the moment where all the goodwill of activists and my concerns really started to fray”.

Suggesting a solution of her own - to simply “call this ship home to Australia” - Hanson Young compared Labor’s Indonesian negotiations with the dismantled Pacific Solution. Neither accepted immediate processing obligations, she argued, and neither provided “guarantees and ground rules about how people in these situations will be treated”. Because of this, the Greens claimed that indecisive response was both ineffective and unprincipled. “The Prime Minister has lost control of his promise of a humane approach ... as the ship endlessly circles around the ocean in the vain hope of a place to land”.

While the Australian government eventually ended the standoff by promising to resettle any genuine Oceanic Viking refugee, the question of unauthorised boats only became more prominent in 2010, with arrivals again tripling. This tested Labor’s public commitment to “border protection”, along with Chris Evans’s

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60 Hanson Young, Sarah, (10th of October, 2016), personal interview.
contention that the government could both “maintain strong border security on the one hand, but also treat people fairly and humanely on the other”. In this context, the government spent much of the next year searching for a policy that would reduce the number of people travelling to Australia by boat. In April, the government suspended all new refugee claims from Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, for three and six months respectively (a decision the Greens dismissed as an arbitrary gimmick, a “redneck solution from Prime Minister Rudd ... in time for an election”). In one of her first policy statements after winning the Prime Ministership from Kevin Rudd in July, Julia Gillard raised the possibility of building a processing centre in East Timor, where Australia would send arrivals for UNHCR processing. While President José Ramos-Horta initially expressed interest in the idea, and Labor remained hopeful for much of the next year, East Timorese political opposition later stopped the scheme.

By this point, Labor’s policy agenda and rhetoric around asylum policy were both considerably different to where they started under Evans. What united these proposed schemes was a search for ‘deterrence’. As Julia Gillard expressed it at the time, the government sought to “wreck the people smuggling trade by removing the incentive for boats to leave their port of origin in the first place, to remove both the profitability of the trade and the danger of the voyage”. If Labor and the Greens enjoyed an uneasy consensus around the Nauru and Manus Island detention centres, it was well and truly cracked by this shift. Labor’s agenda became a central point of conflict between the two parties, with each presenting a very different interpretation of the government’s policy goal. On the Labor side, MPs argued that the procession of boat arrivals, crossing a

treacherous sea passage, was inherently dangerous. The resulting deaths were a
moral tragedy - and any future ones needed to be stopped. Maritime fatalities, if
encouraged by Australian policy, were an Australian responsibility. For Chris
Bowen, who took over the Immigration ministry after the 2010 election, the
situation demanded a clear sighted moral calculation:

“I think the debate is so simplistic. It’s very easy to say ‘I’m pro refugee, I
take the morally superior case’. It’s just not true in my view. My moral
compass would not allow me to support a policy where we saw kids
drowning at sea. Now if other people’s moral compass reaches a different
conclusion, points in a different way, I respect that - but don’t act like your
view is the only morally justifiable one. You can’t shrug your shoulders
and say ‘well accidents happen’ - well policies have implications. Policies
do lead to deaths - and a permissive policy on the borders does lead to
deaths. It’s a pretty big call to make.

Our policy was driven by a couple of core beliefs: that there was nothing
humane about people dying at sea; that we could take more refugees, but
we could only do so with an orderly system; and that it was fundamentally
unfair to have people self-selecting as the refugees Australia could case,
who would have died to get their family here if they could make their
decision.”

This was a common sentiment across Labor interviews, with many suggesting
that refugee policy was more complex than opponents credited. Bowen, for
instance, said that he was driven by a utilitarian need to make “difficult decisions
for some to maximise the utility of the many”, a view the Greens could neither
“compute” or “accept”. Even internal Labor opponents of greater deterrence
accepted this concern was authentic. Sue Lines, one such critic, recognised the
personal toll of drownings on responsible ministers:

“I don’t agree with the views of Chris Bowen or Richard Marles, but when
you interview Chris you see that he’s genuinely motivated by those

67 Bowen, Chris, (9th of December, 2015), personal interview.
68 Ibid.
drownings, that’s his beginning and his end and I respect that … I know that it pains him and it pains Tony Burke and that it scarred them.”

The Greens, however, were less accepting. Its MPs generally considered the ‘deaths at sea’ line a convenient distraction, a cloak for Labor’s real, largely political motivation. They particularly did not accept the claim that deterrence and detention could be used for humanitarian ends. According to Adam Bandt, it also conceded the conservative framework introduced by John Howard:

“Well I think the right realised that their approach was barbaric and that they needed a different way of selling it. So they embarked on a campaign to try and shift the debate and make people think that the only way to be compassionate was to have an offshore detention program that was based around stopping people dying at sea. They had some success and Labor went along with it. Labor decided it wasn’t up for the fight and that it was easier to go along with it”.

Hanson-Young agreed, suggesting that Labor’s argument was designed to achieve two, mutually exclusive aims: turning away asylum seekers, while maintaining an image of humanitarianism. In her view, this was not possible:

“Labor was scrambling and trying to speak out both sides of their mouth from the moment of the Oceanic Viking. The deaths at sea argument was used a good twelve to eighteen months after that as a nice cover story. They were already nervous about the border protection argument and were starting to play on Liberal Party turf. And that’s the thing - once you’ve already given the Liberal Party and the Coalition the licence, because you’re using their language, you’ve lost. The arguments over deaths at sea really wasn’t ramped up until 2012”.

According to these Greens MPs, Labor’s “nerves about border protection” were primarily electoral. They argued that, first and foremost, Labor feared losing votes to the Liberal Party, particularly in marginal seats; a fear they traced back

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69 Lines, Sue, (16th of March, 2016), personal interview.
70 Bandt, Adam, (15th of March, 2016), personal interview.
71 Hanson Young, Sarah, (10th of October, 2016), personal interview.
to its initial response to refugee politics under Howard. For Greens representatives, this represented the kind of catch all politics they opposed in the major parties. While some claimed that Labor’s electoral manoeuvre was futile - that it would inevitably lose to a more committed Liberal Party - they still believed it was the government's overriding motivation. According to Janet Rice, it had been driving them since 2001:

“I think it’s been the race to the bottom - once you’ve given ground and you’re on that trajectory, it’s hard to take a stand and say no. Because you’ve already lost so much credibility in terms of saying that human rights are actually going to be paramount in your position, you’ve ceded so much ground in terms of community perceptions. I mean, if we’d had Beazley in 2001 stand up to Howard on human rights grounds and say ‘no, this is just unacceptable on human rights grounds and these people are refugees and the international convention on refugees in valid and people have a right to seek asylum’, that helps to shape the community narrative over it”. 

Some Labor MPs accepted parts of this explanation. Anna Burke, for instance, thought the issue had become “pure politics”, particularly after Tony Abbott assumed the opposition leadership. As she put it, “Abbott was the master of wedging, he just reinvigorated the Howard line that ‘we will decide who comes to this country’”. Melissa Parke, an MP who publicly opposed Labor’s shift towards deterrence, acknowledged the role of polling in the caucus’s decision, which showed that “70% of the population thought this was a serious issue and we needed to get control over the border”. In her view, this popular opinion made Labor “frightened to be drawn into a debate …and wanting to bring in policies that made the issue go away”. While many on the left of the party expressed a weariness about the shift, most, but not all eventually accepted it - believing it would eventually stop the boat movements, and that the government could then establish a more cooperative, regional solution.

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72 Hansen Young, Sarah, (10th of October, 2016), personal interview.
73 Rice, Janet, (11th of April, 2016), personal interview.
74 Burke, Anna, (11th of April, 2016), personal interview.
75 Parke, Melissa, (22nd of March, 2016), personal interview.
Within other parts of Labor, there was some acknowledgment that policy decisions could not be completely divorced from their electoral contexts, especially when refugee arrivals became increasingly visible from 2009 onwards. Importantly, MPs suggested that Labor and the Greens were making decisions within different electoral dynamics. From this perspective, different social concerns helped explain different political attitudes, at least in part. A common thread in the discussion was that, compared to the Greens social base in the professional middle class, some Labor constituents possessed a more cautious relationship with globalisation. According to Andrew Giles, an MP who personally opposed elements of deterrence at the party’s national conference, this made the issue complicated for a Labor government:

“There’s a very large chunk of people who are very intuitively comfortable with the world, because they travel, they consume goods from around the planet, and have a cosmopolitan attitude - which is good, it’s one I share, and I guess I’m that class of person. But what we also have is a very large group of people who have not been dealt a winning hand in globalisation, and have a range of concerns about societal change, often because it’s directly impacted on their lives by them losing their job … The politics of economic insecurity are a really big challenge, and they manifest themselves in many ways - and I’m not suggesting for a second that working class people are inherently opposed to asylum seekers, quite the reverse from the community that I represent - but there clearly are significant challenges faced by a large section of the community that have been successfully preyed upon by demagogues of the right, that have fostered some attitudes which are unhelpful towards asylum seekers”.  

Giles’s analysis evoked Alonso and da Fonseca’s claim that “the electoral politics of immigration posed an ideological and strategic dilemma to Socialist and Social Democratic parties”, squeezed between the anti-immigration right and the universalist left. Labor’s fear was that, when these issues became more salient, identification with conservative cultural policies could trump an economic

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76 Giles, Andrew, (16th of February, 2016), personal interview.
identification with social democracy. In her memoirs, Julia Gillard described this as a “dual constituency issue”:

“Many progressive activists want a compassionate approach, which they define as not viewing unauthorised arrivals as a problem and offering permanent protection … Labor’s more traditional blue collar constituency is unnerved by unauthorised boat arrivals and draws a straight line from too many asylum seekers to too much pressure on things like roads and various services”.

Conscious of these competing imperatives, some Labor figures believed that refugee politics - which accentuated debates around multiculturalism, nationalism and cosmopolitanism - required delicate and careful negotiation. An absolutist position either way risked alienating voters. They also thought the Greens experienced a different political dynamic. Bowen, for instance, suggested that the material and cultural experiences of Greens voters produced a particular attitude towards border politics:

“It goes to [The Greens] support base. If you’re a middle class professional living in the inner city, you can take a quite radical position on refugee issues. If you actually live in the community where refugees live, or if you’re at risk of unemployment and, wrongly, think that a refugee might threaten your job - that would be a wrong conclusion, but it’s one that some people might reach you’ve got a different equation. I think it’s an issue that the Greens identified that, for their constituency, they can highlight a difference of values [with Labor]. But I would argue in many senses they are out of touch. I represent a very multicultural electorate - I would argue that most in Australia - and one of the most refugee heavy electorates in Australia, if not the most. The vast majority of them take a very hard line view on refugee issues. Because they know the system. For them, it’s not an esoteric matter of theory - they’ve done it. They’ve got cousins and brothers and sisters and parents in refugee camps, and they know how impossible boat arrivals make it to

have an orderly system where people get taken out of camps who have no resources to pay for people smugglers”.\textsuperscript{79}

Laurie Ferguson suggested a blunter disconnect between what he called “trendoids” in inner cities and majority community sentiment. An MP for Western Sydney, he pointed to evidence suggesting that, counterintuitively, the greatest social support for multiculturalism and immigration corresponded with John Howard’s aggressive refugee policies. In his view, this was no coincidence. “What most people want ... they don’t mind having high levels of migration, as long as they think the government is in charge”.\textsuperscript{80}

These debates increased after the East Timor deal failed to proceed, at the same time as asylum seeker boats continuing to travel to Australia. Without a policy, the Labor government pursued another scheme, designed to deter arrivals, what became known ‘Malaysia solution’. In May 2011, after seven months of negotiations, Julia Gillard announced an arrangement with the Asian neighbour. The scheme was part regional deal, part people swap. Under the bilateral agreement, Australia would send 800 asylum seekers to Malaysia, and in turn receive 4000 existing refugees in Malaysian detention.\textsuperscript{81} Labor’s new Minister for Immigration, Chris Bowen, admitted that the policy would be controversial, but argued that, by removing the possibility of Australian settlement, the deal would deter prospective asylum seekers from taking the often fatal nautical journey. It would also give 4,000 people an opportunity for settlement.\textsuperscript{82} Because of this, the ‘solution’ would achieve its overriding aim - “breaking the people smugglers’ business model” - as well as benefit people already in regional processing centres.

Continuing their opposition to Labor’s attempts at deterrence, the Greens immediately rejected the Malaysia deal. Bob Brown described the situation as

\textsuperscript{79} Bowen, Chris, (9th of December, 2015), personal interview.
\textsuperscript{80} Ferguson, Laurie, (14th of March, 2016), personal interview.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
“abhorrent”, an improvised and incoherent “dog’s breakfast”. Within a week of the announcement, the Greens presented a motion to the Senate condemning the deal, while calling on the government to “immediately abandon the proposal”. According to Sarah Hanson-Young, the party’s parliamentary wing uniformly backed the stance. The first Greens problem with the scheme was its lack of legal protections for those asylum seekers sent from Australia to Malaysia. On principle, its politicians disagreed with any outsourcing of Australia’s processing obligations, particularly to nations which had not signed the UN Refugee Convention. Pointing to examples of questionable Malaysian treatment of existing refugees - Bob Brown cited reports of caning and corporal punishment within the system - the party claimed that asylum seekers risked abuse and neglect under Labor’s agreement. The party’s second, related critique involved Australia’s duty under international law. In parliament, Bandt asked “why do we sign up to international conventions if we are not going to abide by them? … why do we seek to contract out our obligations? We cannot send fairness offshore”. Because of these issues, Sarah Hanson-Young believed that the party was never going accept the arrangement:

“Malaysia was always going to be a bad idea, there’s a reason why the UN rejected it. It got knocked down in the High Court because the UN rejected it and it didn’t fundamentally fulfill our obligation. When it got knocked down, what was put to the parliament … removed all obligations and said that Australia could send people who arrive by boat to any country, any country, under any circumstances. That was never going to be acceptable. You can’t do that, it is absolutely against international law”.

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85 Hanson Young, Sarah, (10th of October, 2016), personal interview.
88 Hanson Young, Sarah, (10th of October, 2016), personal interview.
Hanson Young referred to the High Court decision, made in late August, which added another complication to Labor’s asylum seeker policy. Argued on behalf of refugees facing deportation to Malaysia, the High Court found the people swap incompatible with section 198A of the *Migration Act*, requiring secondary nations be legally bound to asylum seeker protections.  

This meant that, for Labor to implement the deal, it needed to either amend the *Migration Act*, or convince Malaysia to sign the Refugee Convention. With little hope of the latter, Labor attempted to convince Parliament of its changes, confronting the stated objections to their plan.

With the Greens signalling their opposition, Labor needed Coalition support to pass its legal changes. Despite Tony Abbott’s public mission to “stop the boats”, this never materialised. In an unusual alliance, the Coalition and the Greens voted together to block Labor’s amendments to the *Migration Act*, effectively ending any hope of implementing the Malaysia deal. In Chris Bowen’s mind, the Coalition behaved cynically:

“The Liberals were just engaging in rank opportunism. They were the key villains in that particular equation, because they knew it would have worked. There was no reason for the Liberals to vote against it, they invented the refugee convention one. That was just a fallacy … And it would have worked, it would have stopped the boats, and they knew it take a very salient issue away from them.

So on that issue I am more critical of the Liberals than the Greens, because I accept that the Greens believed in their vote. I disagree with it profoundly, but I accept that their worldview led them to that vote … They couldn’t accept that you have to take some difficult decisions on some to maximise the utility of the many. They just couldn’t compute that, that we could actually save a lot more people, we could have a rational policy, reduce or stop the drownings, and the outcome would be better”.

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90 Bowen, Chris, (9th of December, 2015), personal interview.
Tony Burke, who later became Immigration Minister, agreed with this assessment. “The Liberals voted against it because they knew it would work”, he said, noting that “half the people who drowned at sea drowned after the Malaysia solution folded”. While Liberal politicians argued that the deal would “strip away prior protections”, they still supported offshore processing - instead they advocated a return to Howard era policies, particularly Pacific detention in Nauru. Because of this combined opposition, the legislation was defeated, with the Malaysian people swap remaining incompatible with the Migration Act.

The failure of the deal, ensured in part by aggressive Greens oppositions, marked a significant change from the government’s first year in office. Where Labor’s first twelve months was characterised by the end of Pacific detention and cooperation with the Greens, however shaky and imperfect the agreement might have been, the subsequent period witnessed the disintegration of anything close to consensus. On each major issue - responding to the MV Oceanic Viking, the moratorium on Sri Lankan and Afghani refugees, the Malaysian people swap - Labor and the Greens found themselves on opposite sides of the debate. Just as strikingly, the issue provoked a level of partisan abuse rarely observed in other portfolios. By this stage, the Greens were willing to publicly denounce Labor’s moral foundation. As Sarah Hanson-Young put it “if the Labor Party still has a soul, it should be searching through it with a fine-toothed comb right now”.

Back to Nauru and Papua New Guinea (2012-2013)

If the divisions between Labor and the Greens grew in the years preceding the Malaysia plan’s failure, transforming a form of consensus into partisan rancour, they were cemented in Labor’s last year in power. Like the previous period, this

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91 Burke, Tony, (10th of February, 2016), personal interview.
final act was triggered by the deaths of asylum seekers at sea. In the last week of June 2012, two boats travelling to Christmas Island capsized, sending out distress signals for nautical rescue. In one of the worst cases in recent memory, the first boat sank north of Christmas Island, killing an estimated 92 Pakistani and Afghani refugees. Just five days after this disaster, another boat capsized in the area. While search teams rescued the majority of passengers, they were unable to save the lives of four asylum seekers.

These tragedies prompted an emotional session of federal Parliament (members of all parties, from Hanson-Young to the Liberal Party’s Joe Hockey, spoke tearfully of the situation). It also motivated Labor to revive its Malaysia plan, this time with a concession, suggested by independent Rob Oakeshott, that would also reopen the Nauru detention centre. But in a repeat of 2011, the Senate again rejected the proposal, with both the Greens and Coalition opposing a change to the Migration Act. Left at an impasse, with no substantive asylum policy amid the persistent arrival of boats, Labor was forced to pursue yet another avenue to deterrence: an ‘independent review’, led by former Defence chief Angus Houston. According to Julia Gillard, a bipartisan figure like Houston was needed to break the deadlock in parliament. Released six weeks later, Houston’s report brought refugee policy full circle from the Howard years. Its central recommendation was to re-establish detention facilities in Nauru and Papua New Guinea - returning, in essence, to the Pacific solution. On top of the change to the processing architecture, the panel also supported increasing the overall humanitarian intake to 20,000 annual places. While this represented a reversal from Labor’s stance upon entering government, the party accepted the

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substance of Houston’s recommendations. The Prime Minister, who herself authored Labor’s opposition in 2002, stated that compromise was the only way to stop the maritime deaths. “I’m not going to play politics or look at political scoreboards”, stated, “when too many lives have been lost”. 99

If the Labor Party was open to changing its position in the name of deterrence, the Greens were not, with the minor party again opposing the expansion of offshore processing. Sarah Hanson-Young argued that the practice would not deter boats, “when people are fleeing for their lives”; it would only move them “out of sight, out of mind”. 100 Others reflected pessimistically on the state of national debate. “We have stumbled down a very dark rabbit hole”, Scott Ludlam argued”, “based on a false premise that border security is somehow related to how we treat desperate people fleeing desperate circumstances”. 101 Floating its own alternative response to the sea passage - to grant extra funding to multilateral regional bodies, with the hope of processing refugees before they got on boats - the party reserved its sharpest critique for members of the Labor Party. Speaking directly to government Senators, Hanson-Young accused Labor of grave moral betrayal. “This is your legislation and it’s worse than John Howard’s … I have no idea how any of you will be able to sleep straight at night”. 102

For the first time under Abbott, the Coalition now agreed to Labor’s legislation, and its return to the Pacific detention architecture. But in the months following the Houston report’s implementation, it became clear to government that boats were still travelling to Australia, too many for them all to be sent to the revived processing facilities. This trend continued in 2013, with Labor allowing the extra refugees into Australia to be processed on bridging visas, though with no right

to work and limited financial support. When Kevin Rudd retook Labor’s leadership in June 2013, over 13,000 asylum seekers had arrived in the first half of the year. In the final period of refugee politics under Labor, the new Prime Minister introduced his own new, “very hard line” response to boat arrivals: what the media called his ‘Papua New Guinea solution’. Under this agreement, negotiated with PNG leader Peter O’Neil, any asylum seeker arriving in Australia by boat would forfeit the chance of being settled in Australia. Instead, refugees found to be legitimate would be offered resettlement in Papua New Guinea, a nation Rudd described as “an emerging economy with a strong future, a robust democracy which is also a signatory to the United Nations Refugee Convention”. Australia would bear the cost for the new facilities, as well as extra funding for PNG’s universities, health system and police force.

The Green opposition to Rudd’s final reform was even more aggressive than its earlier opposition. Christine Milne compared Labor’s plan to Soviet era prison camps. “It’s not a regional solution, but a radical, right-wing, hardline response … Manus Island will be Australia’s gulag in PNG”. Hanson-Young described it as a “cold, cruel policy ... wheeled out for cheap political gain”. With the upcoming election in September, the party placed billboards on asylum policy in target seats like Grayndler in Sydney’s inner city. If the Greens and ALP began on a similar page, opposed to excesses of Pacific detention, by 2013 the partisan division was well established, substantive and passionate. As leader, Milne

argued that the election would hinge on the policy. “Cruelty to refugees by the old parties is the defining issue of this election campaign”, she said.109

Conclusion

Like with carbon pricing, the politics of asylum seekers in the Labor years did not follow a simple narrative. In Labor’s first year in power, the government repealed key elements of the regime it inherited from the Coalition - a policy trajectory strongly supported by the Greens. After 2009, however, this changed significantly. With the oncoming ‘fifth wave’ of unauthorised people movement, Labor shifted towards deterrence, while the Greens remained opposed to the series of policies Labor promoted. So why, following the increase of people movement, did Labor change its stances while Greens representatives kept theirs?

The first layer of explanation involves different responses to maritime deaths. As Sue Lines put it, the tragedies “scarred” Labor MPs, particularly those responsible for the immigration portfolio. More than anything, Chris Bowen viewed his job as stopping the boat movements - even if that required “difficult decisions for some”. The Greens, however, rejected this rationale, as well as being suspicious of its authenticity. In the view of their MPs, it obscured just how difficult the decisions would be for those caught up in deterrence. They also claimed that, if Labor really wanted to stop the boats, it could pursue more radical measures, like significantly increasing the intake, and making it easier for regional centres to send people directly to Australia for processing.

The second, more explicitly political explanation involved different electoral dynamics, or at least their perception by each party. Mirroring points made in the international literature on social democratic parties, a number of Labor MPs

expressed a sensitivity to the way refugee politics interacted with different social groups. Julia Gillard called this a ‘dual constituency’ issue, where parts of its working class base - because of either perceived economic interest or skepticism towards cultural liberalism - were less likely to accept unauthorised boat arrivals than progressive, middle class voters. While Greens MPs agreed with this explanation, claiming that Labor was driven primarily by political concerns, they rejected the approach to politics implicit within it. In their view, it was inappropriate to insert electoral considerations into what should have been a matter of principle - and that it was further proof of what they considered Labor’s debased model of catch all politics.
CHAPTER SEVEN
The mining tax, 2010-2013

In his interview for the thesis, Wayne Swan suggested that Labor’s defining trait, the common thread through its history, was a commitment to “social democracy, or democratic socialism”. Swan referred to an economic philosophy, tied fundamentally to the interests of trade unions and working class people.  

With the rise of parties affiliated with organised labour, various scholars attempted to define their shared, central contribution to politics. Many of them looked to the work of Karl Polanyi, a political economist writing during World War II. In his 1944 book, The Great Transformation, Polanyi argued that recent European history could only be understood in the context of a “double movement”: the expansion of free markets in the 19th century, and the subsequent attempt to protect society from their harshest implications. According to his analysis, the free market project created “fictitious commodities” in land, labour and money. Labour was particularly “fictitious”, he thought, because while it possessed exchange value in the production process, it was certainly not created as a commodity - it was “only another name for human activity that goes with life itself”. It was in this context that Polanyi outlined his definition of “socialism”:

“Socialism is, essentially, the tendency inherent in an industrial civilisation to transcend the self-regulating market by consciously subordinating it to a democratic society”.  

Later scholars took Polanyi’s central idea, but instead applied it to ‘social democratic’ parties and movements. In her comparative study of European parties, Sherri Berman defined social democracy as a belief that “political forces rather than economic ones should be the driving forces of history”. Labor activists formed parties to promote their economic interests, but also in a deeper

1 Swan, Wayne, (10th of February, 2016), personal interview.
2 Polanyi, Karl, (1944), The great transformation: the political and economic origins of our time, Beacon Press, Boston, p.72.
3 Ibid, p.234.
sense to assert the “primacy of politics”.⁵ Gosta Esping-Andersen’s welfare typology came to a similar conclusion. Building on Polanyi, Esping-Andersen defined social democracy as a commitment to “decommodifying” labour. Citing healthcare, unemployment assistance, pensions and public education as examples, the Scandinavian argued that social democracies rendered services as a “matter of right”, not a result of labour market performance.⁶ In his expression, it was a movement dedicated to defending “politics against markets”.⁷

Throughout the 20th century, these social democratic ideas faced criticism on both left and right flanks. From the left, more radical socialists questioned the adequacy of their tools, arguing that “politics against markets” was never a fair fight under capitalism. In his influential polemic, What is to be Done?, Vladimir Lenin dismissed what he called “trade union politics”, the tendency to “reduce class struggle … to a ‘realistic’ struggle for petty, gradual reforms”.³ Lenin argued that a proper left politics did not just provide a safety net for labour, it “abolished the system that forces those without property to sell themselves to the rich”.⁹ From the right, critics attacked the efficacy of its political interventions, claiming that economic planning would eventually collapse under the complexity of its task. According to Hayek, economic activity was so kaleidoscopic in nature, so diverse and organic in breadth, that the state could not hope to understand it, let alone guide it intelligently.¹⁰ Because of this, right critics argued that social democratic policies were ineffective, and that markets should be allowed to “reduce greatly the number of issues decided by political means”.¹¹

If social democracy’s raison d’être was placing politics on a comparable pedestal to markets, certain global economic regimes made this task easier than others.

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⁵ Ibid.
⁸ Lenin, Vladimir, (1902), ‘What is to be done?’ In Essential works of Lenin, Courier Corporation, New York, p.63.
⁹ Ibid, p.95.
¹⁰ Hayek, Frederik, (1944), The Road to Serfdom, Routeledge Press, New York.
In the political economist John Ruggie’s phrase, social democracy enjoyed its longest summer during the period of “embedded liberalism” - the post-war international order designed to balance both trade and domestic autonomy. Governing in the shadow of the Great Depression, nations were conscious of the need to create a “system of currency relations compatible with domestic stability”. This meant building an economic order that facilitated international trade, while still granting states the room to regulate and soften capitalist volatility. Balancing these considerations was the task of the Bretton Woods conference, held between the forty-four Allied countries in 1944. The agreement struck at Bretton Woods was “liberal”, insofar as it fixed currencies to the American dollar, lending confidence to the international movement of goods and services. It was “embedded” in social and political objectives - Ruggie actually borrowed the term from Polanyi - as capital controls allowed governments to advance policies without risking capital flight.

By the early 1970s, however, this ‘Golden Age’ of social democracy was losing its lustre. Sluggish growth and rising inflation buggered developed economies, fostering disillusion with the expansionist policies the regime was built to preserve. It was in this context that Richard Nixon chose to effectively end the Bretton Woods system, removing the United States from the ‘gold standard’ and floating its currency in 1971. This began a process that eventually overturned the post-war order, replacing it with “an almost fully liberal pattern of financial relations between advanced industrial states”. If Berman was right, and social democracy was about the “primacy of politics”, a return to financial globalisation was significant. The mechanisms facilitating domestic autonomy against markets, that held back the tide of international capital, were fundamentally challenged by the free proliferation of global finance. By the 1990s, Ruggie was himself forced to accept that these changes constituted the “end of an era”, the

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end of the “embedded liberal compromise” he used to explain post-war politics.15

Financial and economic globalisation posed problems for social democrats, “impinging on domestic society in ways that can conflict with long-standing social contracts to protect citizens from the relentlessness of the free market”.16 Increasing capital’s exit options, it reduced the state’s ability to fund social programs, making it more difficult to tax capital, and placing a greater tax burden on labour. Different scholars framed this phenomenon in different ways, but most identified the same trend. Peter Evans asked whether private actors now “eclipsed” state power.17 Susan Strange argued that we were witnessing the “retreat of the state” from its central position in social life.18 Others linked this impotence to lost “trust” in government, as well as the “hollowing out” of mass parties.19 In Australia, scholars observed the Hawke-Keating Labor government’s greater acceptance of market organisation - pursuing certain financial, as well as labour market deregulations - and debated whether this constituted a break with the party’s social democratic heritage.20

This chapter examines an economic policy that overlapped with both social democratic philosophy and the constraints placed on it by globalisation. In the Labor government’s attempt to increase minerals revenue - from its announcement of a ‘Resources Super Profits Tax’, to the eventual implementation of a ‘Minerals Resource Rent Tax’ - it asserted a greater public

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stake in private economic activity, while confronting the interests of multinational organisations. In the context of theories about ‘material’ and ‘post material’ politics, the chapter is interested in how Labor and the Greens approached the economic policy. With Labor’s history and social base, did it place a greater emphasis on social democratic intervention than the Greens, a party that grew out of ‘post material’ campaigns? Or did the two share ‘left’ instincts, both seeking to “consciously subordinate” the market to democratic society?

The two taxes

In the wave of enthusiasm following Labor’s election in 2007, Kevin Rudd convened the Australia 2020 Summit, a conference held in Sydney to discuss the party’s policy agenda. Inviting academics, professionals, activists and artists, the gathering was designed to “help shape a long term strategy for the nation’s future”. As if to throw off the previous decade’s shackles, the summit was loose and informal; participants roamed the event with bare feet, sketching ideas onto butcher’s paper. While some commentators criticised the conference - dismissing it as a “talkfest”, “all process and no outcome” - the summit triggered at least one important government decision: the commissioning of a national tax review, to be conducted by the Treasury Secretary, Dr Ken Henry.

Released in May 2010, Henry’s report made 138 specific recommendations. One of its main proposals was to change the way Australia taxed minerals, abolishing the existing royalties system and implementing a new ‘resource rent tax’. The report suggested that, because natural resources were relatively immobile, they represented an “efficient” revenue base. If companies wanted a smaller tax burden, they could not simply take the minerals to a country that

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charged less. The old royalties system, where government imposed a fee for the minerals, did not track international markets, meaning Australia was getting a low return on historically high commodity prices. Because of this, it advocated a tax on “super profits” or “rents”, which would respond to global prices, guaranteeing Australia an “appropriate return from resource exploitation under public and private production”.  

The government initially reacted to Henry’s review cautiously, adopting only a handful of the report’s recommendations. Labor did, however, support the suggested resources regime. In a paper released that week, *The Resource Super Profits Tax: A Fair Return to the Nation*, Labor committed itself to implementing a form of the tax by July 2012. The new scheme would apply to profits above the government’s ten-year bond rate, and charge 40 cents to the dollar. Labor argued that this Resource Super Profits Tax (RSPT) would not only benefit the wider community, it would also help industry. Since it only applied to especially profitable projects, and would reduce the burden on more marginal mines, the tax would actually improve the viability of smaller ventures. The tax would also allow the government to “share” the spoils of the mining boom to other parts of Australia – cutting the company tax rate, investing in infrastructure, and increasing superannuation contributions.

The Greens agreed with Henry’s suggestions on resources taxation, and the RSPT in particular. They did, however, argue that Labor was responding to the broader document too timidly. At the time, Christine Milne described it as a “missed opportunity to really transform Australia’s tax system”. According to Scott Ludlam, the government squandered Henry’s recommendations around housing and land policy:

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“We were supportive of the concept of the mining tax, but if you look at the breadth of the work that Henry and his team did, there was a whole heap of stuff there that the Labor people were too cautious to touch ... The overall reception to the Henry Review was that, well you’ve asked these really bright people to do a really important, broad piece of work, but now you’re just cherry-picking two or three convenient things - what's meant to happen to the rest of it? What happened to land tax, what happened to stamp duty?”

John Hawkins, an economic advisor to Brown and Milne, agreed with the Review’s underlying philosophy, that “if you’re going to fund things like the NDIS and other worthwhile projects, you are going to need some revenue to do that”. Because of this, he would have also liked Labor to be “bolder”, agreeing that there were “more things in there that we would have gone along with”.

While Labor and the Greens supported the new regime, the bulk of Australia’s mining industry did not. The day after Swan’s announcement, the Minerals Council of Australia (MCA) called a press conference, claiming Labor had blindsided the industry. As the Council portrayed the situation, the policy process involved only meagre consultation, especially on the 40% rate and the exact definition of a ‘super profit’. Marius Kloppers, the CEO of BHP Billiton, claimed the tax would “seriously threaten Australia’s competitiveness, jeopardise future investments and adversely impact the future wealth and standard of living of all Australians”. Other prominent mining leaders also spoke publicly, agreeing that Labor’s proposal would weaken a profitable industry, rendering it vulnerable to countries offering lower rates. Australian miners such as Andrew Forrest and Clive Palmer - who later formed his own political party, entering Parliament in 2013 - claimed that any added tax burden would imperil future projects.

29 Ludlam, Scott, (28th of February 2017), personal interview.
30 Hawkins, John, (28th of February 2017), personal interview.
The Minerals Council quickly amplified these arguments, beginning what the Treasurer called “an unprecedented assault on the government”. Hiring Neil Lawrence - the marketer behind Labor’s ‘Kevin 07’ image - the Council launched a television, radio and print campaign to “Keep Mining Strong”. Voiced by self-identified “real people”, the ads claimed the tax would “do long term damage to the communities, families, investment and industries that do so much for this country”. A second line of ads presented a broader narrative, linking the mining industry to Australian history and identity, with the slogan “Australian mining, this is our story”. Figures from the Australian Electoral Council later revealed that, in 53 days, the Minerals Council spent over $22 million dollars attacking the proposal. According to Swan, the reality was more like “triple” the official figure.

The ‘Keep Mining Strong’ campaign corresponded with a significant fall in Labor’s popularity. As Julia Gillard remembered, the advertisements “hit the government hard”, with “all hell breaking loose”. From mid-April to the end of May, the party’s primary vote in public polling dropped from 43% to 35%. This decline was particularly intense in Western Australia, the boom’s epicentre, where Labor’s two party preferred vote fell to 38%. At the time, commentators linked this sliding support to the Minerals Council’s relentless campaign. While a number of other causes were cited for Labor’s removal of Kevin Rudd - including his leadership style, attitude towards colleagues and decision to delay carbon pricing - this formed part of the context in which the Prime Minister lost his job, just six weeks after announcing the profits tax.

35 Minerals Council of Australia, (2011), ‘This is our story’, video, [online] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHuV-zFDfjg
36 Swan, Wayne, (10th of February, 2016), personal interview.
When Gillard assumed the office of Prime Minister, she considered the mining tax Labor’s “most urgent” priority.\(^{40}\) Her first decision as leader was to cancel the public advertisements defending the proposal, calling for a truce in the media battle between Labor and the Minerals Council. She stated that the government was willing to renegotiate the tax - “I am throwing open the door to the mining industry and I ask that, in return, the mining industry throws open its mind” - and that consultation would be led by Wayne Swan and the Resources Minister, Martin Ferguson.\(^{41}\) The Minerals Council accepted the invitation, pulling its advertisements, and agreed to negotiations. Consultation was then conducted directly with the three biggest miners, BHP Billiton, Rio Tinto and Xstrata.

In this new climate, a deal came relatively quickly. According to Swan, “it didn’t take us very long to pinpoint the problem” - different assumptions about future commodity prices, and the total revenue it would produce.\(^{42}\) By July the 1st, just a week after she became Prime Minister, Gillard announced a new model for taxing resources. Instead of the Resource Super Profits Tax, the government would legislate a Minerals Resource Rent Tax (MRRT). The two schemes shared the same principle - taxing profits, not charging royalties - but their details differed. Where the initial tax covered all minerals, it now only applied to iron ore and coal. The threshold and tax rate also fell. The MRRT covered profits at the bond rate plus 7% - meaning around 12%, instead of 5% - and charged 30 cents to the dollar instead of 40 cents.\(^{43}\) With the Minerals Council no longer attacking Labor publicly, and the Greens promising to scrutinise the proposal in the Senate, Gillard took the new model to the 2010 election. “We’ve been stuck on this question as a nation for too long”, she said, “and today we’re moving forward together”.\(^{44}\)

Labor’s case for the MRRT

If Wayne Swan identified as a “social democrat or democratic socialist”, Labor’s argument for the mining tax traced a number of social democratic principles. The first of these was that, because minerals resulted from natural processes, no single entity could privatise their value. As Swan put it, “Australians owned 100% of the resources in the ground”, and therefore possessed a legitimate interest in their sale.45 This underpinned Labor defences of the tax, with its politicians defining the minerals as “sovereign assets”, held by “each Australian citizen”.46 It was also an urgent principle, they claimed, particularly given their finite nature. As the minerals took millions of years to organically develop, the nation could only exploit them once. “You only get one go at these resources - you dig them up, you sell them and they are gone … they don’t come back”.47

Labor’s stance on the public nature of minerals was tied to its stance on their distribution. Introducing the legislation to Parliament, Swan stated that “[Labor] chose this path because we believe Australians deserve a fair return for non-renewable resources”.48 Labor politicians linked the tax to national myths, like the “land of the fair go”, suggesting it was the government’s responsibility to “distribute the nation’s wealth equitably”.49 This word, “fair”, came up in most Labor speeches on the bill. Labor politicians argued that, without a progressive state, the mining boom would elude the majority of Australians:

“When prices go to 140-year highs, the Australian people are entitled to a fair return from those resources and they are entitled to have it spread right around their community, not for it to be the exclusive preserve of a few shareholders. These resources are owned by the Australian people, not by the companies”.50

48 Ibid, pp.13408-13410.
50 Ibid.
This represented Labor’s most prominent argument, from announcing the mining tax in May 2010, to designing its public advertisements for the original proposal, to presenting the final bill in November 2011. In this context, “fair” possessed a specific, social democratic meaning: that the state should actively redirect the wealth generated by public resources, granting the wider community a stake in mining’s economic success.

Implicit within Labor’s support for a fair distribution of wealth was a suspicion towards unrestrained markets, and their capacity to achieve egalitarian goals. Government figures suggested that, if left to the industry, mining profits would concentrate among an already prosperous few. In Polanyi’s phrase, this required politics to “consciously subordinate” the market economy, and Labor proposed a number of mechanisms to do this.51 As Swan set out, the new revenue would fund three specific things: a three percent increase in superannuation contributions, a one percent cut in the business tax rate, and a $6 billion investment in road, rail and port infrastructure. Labor’s Minister for Regional Australia, Simon Crean, argued the bill was therefore “not a tax for general revenue purposes”, but “specifically designed to take a slice of the excess profits of the nation’s natural resources … and reinvest”.52

The notion of “reinvestment” referred to the party’s second economic argument. While Labor MPs claimed that redistribution was itself desirable, in this case allowing people to retire with greater material comfort, they also suggested it was more economically efficient than the status quo. This was because mining’s remarkable success tended to inflate the Australian dollar, which obstructed other industries. As Swan argued, certain structural adjustments could actually make the country more profitable:

“We also understand that not every industry is in the mining-boom fast lane. We understand that tourism and other parts of manufacturing are suffering because our dollar is higher. We understand it is important to

51 Polanyi, Karl, (1944), The great transformation: the political and economic origins of our time, Beacon Press, Boston, p.234.
put in place a range of policies that make our economy more competitive and give a fairer go to those businesses”.  

Crean suggested that this was particularly important for smaller towns, currently experiencing a difficult economic transition. As he put it, these areas represented “the patches in the patchwork economy”, and infrastructure could help diversify their industries, creating a fertile environment for other, non-extractive skills and services. While Labor MPs believed that government could legitimately intervene in markets to promote an image of equality, they also argued it possessed an important investment function: to shift money towards projects that, because of their sheer size and cost, private industry would not ordinarily fund.

As with the Minerals Council’s campaign against the original RSPT, the most prominent critique of Labor’s policy involved its allegedly destructive impact on the Australian mining industry. Government MPs rejected this claim in a number of ways. Some representatives dismissed it outright, suggesting that “talk of ‘dagger in the heart’ stuff [is] overblown rhetoric and nonsense”. Others confronted the argument more directly, explaining why Australia represented a safe investment environment, far more secure than potential rivals. While not rejecting the existence of global pressures, Labor MPs noted Australia’s political and economic stability, suggesting that intelligent investors would ignore the opposition’s dire warnings:

“The quality of our resources, the efficiency of our supply chain, the efficiency of our workforce, the long-standing rule of law and the demonstrated history of returns on investment will simply not give weight to that argument.”

This applied to many of the countries being floated as competitors, especially those in South America and Africa. While these areas possessed economic

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54 Ibid, pp. 13235-13237.
55 Ibid, pp. 13261-13262.
potential, they were currently “very high risk”, led by “governments with guns”. As Labor MPs pointed out, investment decisions were driven by more than tax rates. Africa might possess cheaper resources, but “political stability there is a distinct factor … obviously Australia compares extremely well”.

Labor’s arguments for the mining tax hinted at Berman’s formulation of social democracy, suggesting that “political forces rather than economic ones” should guide Australia’s historic commodities boom. When Labor politicians reflected on their reasons for supporting the bill, a number situated it within the party’s deeper philosophical tradition. Stephen Jones described it as “the sort of legislation that you would expect Labor governments to introduce”. Wayne Swan framed it as an extension of “Labor values”. These Labor politicians presented the proposal as a symbol the partisan divide, of what separated Australia’s major parties. Dick Adams expressed this feeling while concluding his parliamentary defence of the tax:

“... when I see the other side of this House not wanting to share the profits of the mining boom across the whole of Australia—and we know that we do have different levels within our economy—I know why I am in the Labor Party”.

The Coalition and the MRRT

As Adams hinted, under Tony Abbott, the Coalition opposed both variations of the mining tax. In the charged atmosphere surrounding the RSPT debate - the world’s richest woman, Gina Rinehart, hosted rallies in Perth, personally leading chants to “axe the tax!” - the Liberal and National parties expressed similar

concerns to the mining industry.63 Its MPs rejected Labor’s major arguments for the bill, as well as the social democratic principles underpinning them. When Wayne Swan unveiled the RSPT, Abbott claimed it would “kill” mining businesses:

“I am very hostile to the idea of a great big new tax on the mining sector. The danger here is that we kill the goose that laid the golden egg for everyone here in Australia”.64

Even after Julia Gillard renegotiated a new model with the three mining companies, opposition MPs claimed it would undermine the industry, perhaps fatally. As proof, they pointed to falling stock prices, as well as reports from industry that major projects were being delayed, risking “billions of dollars of investment”.65 Where Labor figures minimised the proposal’s impact on mining profitability, Coalition politicians argued that, in era of intense globalisation, any extra imposition would undermine it. In Parliament, almost every Coalition member spoke on the bill, and almost all echoed this point, claiming it “would severely affect Australia’s competitiveness in the resources sector”.66 Some took the suggestion further, arguing that Labor was creating a “sovereign risk” in the Australian economy. According to Joe Hockey, the Shadow Treasurer, the changes would make investors cautious:

"Seemingly capricious decisions and policy backflips have caused reduced financial returns for investments already made or in the pipeline, and have greatly increased the uncertainty about the environment for future investment decisions".67


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According to opposition MPs, this was a concern precisely because of mining’s extreme profitability. By slowing the industry, Labor was slowing the entire country. Andrew Robb described the tax as “a lead weight around the neck of our greatest strength”. Though Labor MPs claimed the new regime would actually improve the nation’s broader productivity, Coalition representatives ridiculed the suggestion, arguing that Labor could not comprehend even basic business dynamics. In opposition’s view, the bill would only “increase the revenue stream flowing into the coffers of an incompetent, hopeless and economically illiterate Labor-Greens government”.

On top of the Coalition’s economic case, Liberal and National figures also presented a philosophical opposition to the legislation. Warren Truss, the leader of the Nationals, compared it to Advance Australia Fair:

“Even in our national anthem we praise the advances of ’wealth for toil’. It is the Australian ideal that the harder you work the greater your rewards. For any government to decide what constitutes acceptable profits sets a dangerous precedent. Never try to be too successful in this country because, if you do, if we have a Labor government it will think up a new special tax to make sure you cannot keep being successful”.

The implicit accusation here was that the bill was in some sense ‘socialist’, using state power to arbitrarily redistribute private wealth. Julie Bishop wondered whether the “old socialist mindset is creeping back into the national debate … as Labor seeks ways to soak money out of the most productive part of the economy.” Craig Kelly argued that super profits were a “reward for human ingenuity”, now threatened by the government’s “socialist tendencies”. Present here was a different conception of property and national resources. Where Labor

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70 Ibid, pp.13325-13327.
MPs emphasised the natural qualities of minerals, Coalition members stressed the effort and energy required to make them useful. Instead of seeing the bill as an expression of democracy over economic life, the Coalition viewed it as an illegitimate imposition on business and individuals. And as Andrew Robb put it, Liberal and National politicians opposed any example of “old-style socialist government”. 73

The opposition’s final problem with the tax related to the role and autonomy of state governments. Expressed by numerous Western Australian representatives, this suggested the tax was a misuse of federal power:

“[the bill is] a further intrusion of the government into the revenue sphere, autonomy and budget flexibility of the states and territories. While the mining tax is envisaged to operate alongside state royalties, with a tax credit available for state royalty payments, I suspect there is a significant risk that states will effectively be crowded out of this revenue base”. 74

While tied to the economic interests of mining states - the Coalition won 12 of WA’s 15 lower house seats at the 2010 election - some MPs linked it to a philosophy of decentralisation, presenting local autonomy as a defence against concentrated, tyrannical power. 75 Not all of its MPs, however, were this philosophical. Others saw it a naked betrayal of an industrious state. Luke Simpkins declared the tax an “attack on Western Australia”. 76 Don Randall called it an “evil tax … a taxation of envy”, designed to hurt states that “actually do things”. 77

These three disagreements - over the impact of global competition, the legitimacy of redistribution, and the balance of federalism - underpinned the Coalition’s opposition to a resources rent tax. If social democracy was premised

74 Ibid, pp.13343-13345.
75 Ibid.
on the legitimate subordination of economics to politics, Liberal and National politicians rejected the mission as illegitimate. When Labor figures said that legislation represented “Labor values”, Coalition politicians did not necessarily disagree. But rather than seeing those values as visionary and just, they considered them an arbitrary and dangerous excursion into private economic life.

The Greens and the Mining Tax

If this was the philosophical ground over which the major parties fought, the Greens shared Labor’s most significant assumptions. The most important of these was the foundational belief that, through political intervention, the state could justifiably readjust economic activity for the sake of other goals – to share national wealth, to provide universal services, and to protect the natural environment. While Coalition politicians rejected this idea - according to Dennis Jensen, the debate was about “freedom from unjust wealth redistribution” - Greens representatives pointed to ways in which an active government could redirect the mining boom towards a greater good. In the House of Representative, Adam Bandt articulated the minor party’s priorities:

“We must take the fruits of this boom and invest in health, education, science and infrastructure. We must ensure that the boom does not destroy the rest of the economy. And we must build an economy that is sustainable and fair”.

Present here were many of the ideas that drove the party’s response to the mining tax: a paradoxical belief that the boom was both a rare opportunity and genuine social threat; an acknowledgment that, if the mining industry was going to exist, its spoils should be spread as widely as possible; and a conviction that, because the market was incapable of this kind of distribution, the state must step in. These ideas underpinned Green policy, though they found different avenues

of expression. Christine Milne linked state intervention to concrete proposals, like “a very fast train, dental care and a modern public transport system”. 79 Penny Wright suggested the tax could fund “the National Disability Insurance Scheme, income support that allows people to live with dignity, and a fairer quality public education system”. 80 Other members wanted to establish a ‘sovereign wealth fund’, which would act as “a source of capital for the future when the well has run dry … and as a hedge against rapid currency movements”. 81 While differing in detail, these proposals shared some of Labor’s assumptions about the imperfection of markets and the legitimate role of democratic politics within them. If the mining tax debate was divided into two philosophical camps, separated by a fundamental rift, it was between the right and left wing parties, not Labor and the Greens.

There were, however, important differences even within this principled agreement. The first of these was their respective attitudes towards the mining industry itself. Across the debate, Greens politicians were much more willing than Labor equivalents to challenge the desirability of the Australian mining sector, linking the tax to the social and environmental costs associated with resource extraction. Before discussing specific taxation regimes, the party began its submission to the Senate enquiry on the bill with a critique of certain ideas surrounding the mining boom – namely that it was the “goose that laid the golden egg for everyone in Australia”, as Tony Abbott described it. The Greens submission argued that the boom’s economic impact was dubious at best, distorting and damaging at worst. Citing research by The Australia Institute (a left-leaning think-tank with links to the Greens – its Executive Director, Richard Denniss, previously advised Bob Brown) the submission highlighted ways in which the industry’s profitability harmed other interests. 82 The high exchange rate, for instance, led to “lower profits and lower returns to shareholders in other

82 Australian Greens, (2012), ‘Minority report by the Australian Greens’, Economics Legislation Committee, Minerals Resources Rent Tax Bill 2011 [Provision] and related bills, p.120.
industries, such as manufacturing and tourism”.\(^{83}\) This was compounded by the fact that mining companies were “predominantly foreign owned”, with “most of these profits [going to] shareholders overseas”.\(^{84}\) Where the Liberal Party painted the industry as nationally vital, the Greens disagreed. The boom only meant good times for some, its MPs argued, and was an active disturbance for many others.

The Greens’ most vehement critique of mining revolved around its impact on the natural environment. According Larissa Waters, a Senator from Queensland, future mining projects would profoundly damage Australia and the world:

“I took a flight over the Galilee Basin just a few weeks ago with Senator Bob Brown and saw the sites of those proposed mega coal mines. They will be the biggest coal mines on the planet if they are approved. I thought it was particularly depressing that, if those mines are approved in the Galilee Basin, their carbon emissions will wipe out the benefits of the carbon price three times over. It is absolutely shocking”.\(^{85}\)

Christine Milne framed mining policy as a national, almost existential choice. Did Australia want to be a “bleak backwater of big holes in the ground, married to a strategy of driving increased greenhouse gas emissions through massive increases in coal mining?”\(^{86}\) This question overlapped with the party’s economic stance. While Labor rejected the Coalition claim that the tax would weaken Australia’s competitiveness, the Greens responded that, even if it did, that was not necessarily a cause for concern - “were it to lead to some cooling in the feverish expansion of the mining industry, this could be desirable rather than a problem”.\(^{87}\) This antagonism towards the sector ran parallel with its more aggressive position on resource taxation. Hostile to the economic and

\(^{83}\) Ibid, p.117.
\(^{84}\) Ibid, p.117.
environmental consequences of mining, Greens politicians were willing to tax the industry and tax it heavily.

A second difference between Labor and the Greens was in the way each party talked about the revenue, and the ways they would shape the nation with it. The distinction here was subtle, but hinted at important differences between their respective approaches to politics. Labor advocates tended to begin with broad moral bearings (“fairness”, “opportunity”, “the national interest”) while supporting policies that helped individual citizens and companies negotiate a difficult market economy – an increase in superannuation, a company tax cut, an investment in rural infrastructure. These were designed to redistribute wealth, but also to generate economic growth in other parts of Australia. As Chris Bowen put it in his interview, “Labor has always at its core believed in economic growth, it’s always thought that economic growth lifts people out of poverty, and that we have to be generators of economic growth”.

This was quite different to Greens attitudes and arguments. When Christine Milne introduced the existential choice, she provided her own, clear answer:

“If your aim is to use the boom to actually make the transition to the low-carbon economy, to make this investment in education, to make the investment in national disability insurance and to actually change society to get it to where you want to be, then you need to maximise your returns in the national interest and invest them wisely.”

While Greens politicians agreed with Labor’s basic social democratic case, their vision for the revenue was less ‘material’ than the major party. Rather than economic growth, the party sought a more fundamental social transformation. As Milne hinted, Greens politicians wanted to use the revenue to transition Australian away from physical, extractive industries, and towards an economy built around education, professional services, caring and environmental preservation. A second difference was that, where Labor’s policies were

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88 Bowen, Chris, (9th of December, 2015), personal interview.
designed to help people survive and flourish in a market economy, the Greens instead prioritised universal service provision. While their suggestions were ambitious and scattered - fast trains, increased public education funding, a disability insurance scheme, a sovereign wealth fund - they were qualitatively different to Labor’s policies. The proposals were overwhelmingly services, provided by the state, which they believed private interests would not provide.

Despite these differences, the Greens did eventually vote for the Minerals Resources Rent Tax in Parliament. When the bill passed the Senate in March 2012, all nine Greens Senators supported it. According to a number of its politicians, this was done with “considerable reluctance”.90 Greens MPs claimed that Henry’s original proposal offered a superior model, unpolluted by the interest groups allegedly distorting debate. In Scott Ludlam’s memory, the Greens vote followed a complex utilitarian calculation, linked to its perception of Labor behaviour:

“That was one of those examples of is this going to be better than nothing? Because you had enough of the people on the Labor side desperate for the deal to fall over, desperate for us to either vote against it, or get some amendments in there that Gillard when then people able to say ‘well it’s all too hard’, ‘the Greens blocked the mining tax’ … So the judgement was made at the time that we’d try a few amendments, we weren’t going to be super aggressive about it … but no, Labor voted against all of those and the Coalition voted against all of those. So it was either a choice between a pissweak mining tax or nothing at all”.

While the party supported three big changes to Labor’s legislation - broadening the coverage to other minerals like gold, nickel and copper; lowering the point at which the tax kicked in; and raising the effective rate back to 40% - its final concessions were more modest. In negotiations with the government, the Greens secured small changes to the bill, projected to increase revenue by $100 million over five years.92 The minor party ultimately supported the tax, but

91 Ludlam, Scott, (28th of February 2017), personal interview.
expressed disappointment at the political limits imposed on it. Penny Wright articulated this when she concluded that “the sad truth is that this bill is a wasted opportunity”.  

The aftermath

In early 2013, Labor stated that, based on advice from the Australian Tax Office, it could not disclose information about the tax’s actual revenue performance. While based on privacy concerns, this was a contentious claim, and both the Greens and Coalition disagreed. In Parliament, both groups supported a motion, ultimately successful, ordering the Tax Office to release the receipts. Published on the 7th of February, the numbers painted a stark picture. The MRRT raised just $126 million over six months, well short of the $2 billion projected for its first financial year. While Labor attributed this to factors outside its control - a higher dollar, lower commodities prices, greater than expected deductions by industry - Gillard later admitted it was “both concerning and politically embarrassing”. The Coalition attacked the government, suggesting Swan should resign over it.

Greens politicians were even more disgruntled than Hockey. Christine Milne, who forwarded the Senate motion, described the figures as “shockingly low”. Because of this, the Greens and Coalition initiated a Senate inquiry into the state and future of the tax. In the Greens’ report, the minor party distanced itself from Labor. Scott Ludlam, a participating member of the inquiry, argued that “without reform, the government is in danger of wasting the mining boom and

97 Ibid.
allowing the mining industry to ride roughshod over the rest of the economy”. 99

In order to increase its revenue, the party again affirmed its commitment to Ken
Henry’s initial recommendations: to raise the effective rate to 40%, to extend
coverage to other minerals and to lower the profit rate at which the tax began.

On February the 19th, two weeks after the ATO released its figures, Christine
Milne gave a speech to the National Press Club, stating that the Greens was now
“moving beyond the Agreement”. 100 Despite most Greens politicians later
expressing pride in the minority government, Milne argued that Labor had
betrayed their deal, “effectively ended its Agreement with the Greens”. As
evidence for this, she cited the government’s allegedly tight relationship with the
mining industry, both in terms of taxation and new projects in Tasmania:

“What has become manifestly clear is that Labor, by its actions, has walked
away from its agreement with the Greens and into the arms of big miners
… by choosing the miners, the Labor government is no longer honouring
our agreement to work together to promote transparent and accountable
government and the public interest or to address climate change”. 101

Milne argued that Labor’s refusal to implement the Henry Review, along with
its support of mining in the Tarkine region, meant that “Labor’s priorities lie
with powerful interests, not with the people and the Greens”. 102 In her later
interview, she expressed a broader, more strategic reason for making a public
statement about the Agreement. According to Milne, Greens politicians believed
that Gillard was herself beginning to cut ties with the minor party:

"The minute we ticked over into 2013, we were in an election year, and it
was very clear to me that Labor had now dumped the Agreement and was
going to go for broke on reelection. So what they did was systematically
renege on both the spirit of the deal and the broader arrangement. A
classic case of that was Tony Burke and mining the Tarkine ... They started

Economics Reference Committee, Development and Operation of the Minerals Resources
Rent Tax, p.101.
100 Milne, Christine, (2013), ‘Senator Milne’s speech to the Press Club’, 19th of February 2013,
national-press-club-20130219-2eoyc.html
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
to basically walk all over the Greens agenda and here we were keeping them in government, and they had made a clear decision to thumb their noses at us”.

Because of this, Milne thought it was better for the Greens to state its case publicly, and begin the election year independent of Labor:

“So what are your choices here? You just put up with it or you just bring us down. And so I thought, we “that's it, they've clearly made up their mind, they're not going to honour this Agreement any further. So I decided it was better to get up and say that, that it was clear Labor has decided to renege on the Agreement. Let’s say publicly what has already happened privately”.

Ludlam agreed with this broader interpretation. In his view, the Greens caucus wanted to disentangle itself from Labor and its growing internal dysfunction:

“We didn’t sign an Agreement with Gillard expecting this rolling shit-show. We didn’t think we were going to get Rudd back, and that they were going to spend most of the time talking about themselves instead of getting things done. So we had plenty of opportunities to help improve stuff, but these folks were quite clearly drifting to total internal destruction, and there was no interest in us going down with them. I don’t get a vote in their caucus, so I'm not actually interested in getting splattered with the entrails coming out of their party room:”.

While Milne continued to grant Labor confidence and supply in Parliament - as Gillard put it, there were “no consequences in relation to stability” – her speech triggered a long week of partisan brawling. In return, governments MPs accused the Greens of political immaturity, a refusal to reconcile their goals with the realities of governance. Gillard claimed she was unsurprised by the Greens’ decision, “because at the end of the day, the Greens party is fundamentally a party of protest rather than a party of government … [which] would prefer to

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103 Milne, Christine, (9th of August, 2016), personal interview.
104 Milne, Christine, (9th of August, 2016), personal interview.
105 Ludlam, Scott, (28th of February 2017), personal interview.
complain about things than get solutions”. Anthony Albanese described the dissolution as a “meaningless act of petulance from an immature political party”. Wayne Swan presented Green inflexibility on mining as evidence of their essential radicalism. Unlike the minor party, Labor did not “pander to extremists on the fringe, be it on the left or right”.

Interpreting Labor and the Greens

As with carbon pricing and refugee processing, the mining tax featured a complex history. Both parties initially supported the RSPT, but after six tumultuous weeks, Labor negotiated a more modest tax - a model for which the Greens voted, however reluctantly. By early 2013, the Greens repudiated this compromise, citing it as one the party’s chief reasons for ending the formal Agreement. What began with a series of shared, social democratic assumptions - that mineral resources were publically owned, that profits should be distributed through the community, and that state intervention was necessary - ended in mutual animosity. Why did Labor change its position, and why did the Greens later abandon it?

One potential explanation involves the institutional and material roots of each party. An organisation affiliated with trade unions could possess different priorities to a party attached to environmental campaigns. Labor might instinctively prioritise employment, while the Greens might emphasise conservationism, even at the expense of economic growth. Julia Gillard advocated this thesis in February 2013, when responding to Christine Milne’s speech:

107 Ibid.
"The leader of the Australian Greens announced her decisions yesterday so they're not mysterious, they're known. You can read the speech that she gave at the Press Club. And she fundamentally said in that speech that they've got a different view about jobs than the Labor Party does … We're a Labor Party, we're the party of work, we're the party of making sure working people have got access to decent jobs and good working conditions."110

But while this potentially explained attitudes towards Tasmanian mining - the Greens was certainly more hostile towards the broader industry - it possessed limited application to the taxation question. Across the debate, trade unions overwhelmingly supported the original model. The sector’s most relevant union, the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, argued that the “RSPT was a much broader and better proposal than the MRRT”, considering the new regime an “undesirable” compromise.111 The ACTU also supported the original proposal. While recognising that Labor “negotiated in good faith with the industry to address its concerns”, the peak body believed Ken Henry was right to recommend a “broadly based resource rent tax with a 40% headline rate”.112 The RSPT found support in other, more surprising places. Paul Howes, the National Secretary of the Australian Workers Union, another group covering miners, also backed the Greens position. Normally antagonistic to the minor party - he once claimed the Greens “posed as much of a threat to working people as Tony Abbott … they just hide it better” - Howes agreed that its stance on the tax was “more than reasonable”.113 The Greens position was actually closer to union preferences than Labor, at least on this issue.

The dominant Greens interpretation of the history involved Labor’s broader approach to politics, and its catch all instinct in particular. According to Greens politicians, the federal Labor party changed its model because of Minerals

Council advertisements, and the electoral pressure they created. At the time, Ludlam suggested that Labor was “caving in to the bruising campaign of intimidation and misinformation run by the Minerals Council”.\textsuperscript{114} Bob Brown described it as a “monumental back down”, driven by the “big miners”.\textsuperscript{115} In Adam Bandt’s memory, Labor feared losing marginal seats, and perhaps even office:

“In Australia we’ve got a political economy that is largely structured around fossil fuels and resources and the mentality is largely “dig it up, chop it down, ship it off”. Now that has certainly been the dominant way Australia has been talked about, but more significantly, it’s the way that those existing interests have managed to capture the Liberals, and significant parts of the Labor Party. And we saw that with the debating around the mining tax. You suggest it might be a good idea to have a tax on a once in a generation boom … and you find the mining industry able to change a government, tear down a Prime Minister and write themselves out of having to pay $100 billion in tax over ten years”.\textsuperscript{116}

Labor figures did not necessarily reject this central claim. The party noted the Council’s campaign, as well as its severe impact on national politics. In an essay written for \textit{The Monthly} in 2012, Wayne Swan reflected on the event, criticising the “rising power of vested interests” in Australian democracy. The Treasurer suggested that, in the country he grew up in, the “infamous billionaires protest against the mining tax would have been laughed out of town”. But, amid an historic commodities boom, they now they “felt they had a right to shape Australia’s future to satisfy their own self-interest”.\textsuperscript{117} Labor figures admitted that this “rising power” influenced the party in a number of ways. In Julia Gillard’s words, the tax was conceptually right, “but the politics were always sour”.\textsuperscript{118} Labor MPs, particularly in mining states, felt battered and besieged.

\textsuperscript{116} Bandt, Adam, (15th of March, 2016), personal interview.
Swan conceded that, while the MCA’s campaign was “flimsy”, it “managed to scare the hell out of the Australian community”, doing serious damage to “the psyche of our caucus”.\textsuperscript{119} Jim Chalmers, Swan’s chief of staff and later the Member for Rankin, described it as the “bloodiest and costliest battle we fought, one that exacted massive toll on both sides and one we barely survived”.\textsuperscript{120}

Bandt suggested that Labor was more susceptible than the Greens to industry advertising, and government politicians did express a greater sensitivity to its political impact. This broadly aligned with the difference assumptions implicit within electorlist and movement parties.\textsuperscript{121} As the leader of an office seeking party within sight of an election, Gillard felt that Labor “needed to fix the mining tax to allow the government to move on to other issues”.\textsuperscript{122} But while this represented part of the story, Labor figures also admitted that the government could have pursued the reform more shrewdly, acting as a more effective ‘catch all’ operation. Swan remembered the initial push as “good policy, frustrated by insufficient process, crashing head on with powerful vested interests”.\textsuperscript{123} In her memoirs, Gillard discussed the insufficient process, recounting Cabinet’s struggle in early 2010 to cement its response to Henry’s report. Swan expressed regret at not presenting the policy earlier, allowing more time for persuasion and community debate.\textsuperscript{124} Because of this, Chalmers “wished [Labor] could have over again”:

“Ideally we would have had a longer run up, and a better sense of the first iteration of the tax before we announced our intention to implement it. On the day it was announced we did actually say these were just the parameters and we wanted to talk to the companies about the details, but this was lost in chaos the followed”.\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{120} Chalmers, Jim, (2013), \textit{Glory daze: how a world beating nation got so down on itself}, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p.159.
While Swan doubted this would have changed the MCA’s response, Labor figures regretted not doing more to minimise powerful opposition. As with climate and asylum seeker policy, this catch all political logic was far more prevalent in Labor than Greens representatives. Scott Ludlam did, however, acknowledge it to a certain extent. In his view, Labor accepted the MRRT partly as a result of its own political failure:

“I give them more credit than some of my colleagues do … in the space of two or three years, they picked a fight with the mining industry, with Murdoch over media reform, to a degree with pharmaceutical companies, the junk food industry and the gambling industry. They’d picked all these serious political fights in parallel, because that was Rudd’s nature, to do all of things all at the same time. A lot of those things we were broadly supportive of, but you don’t go into fights like that unless you really mean to win. And so the mining tax, for example, they felt like they’d suddenly walked into this beautiful slaughterhouse, sand instead of making a case for it they caved. My thumbnail analysis of it was, it’s really hard if your team isn’t unified, to pick a fight with all those interests”.

Conclusion

The first thing to note about Labor and Greens during the mining tax debate was that both parties began with social democratic principles. Compared with Liberal politicians, who generally considered the tax a socialist imposition, both supported a form “politics against markets”. According to Labor and the Greens politicians, an active state was needed to promote a more egalitarian distribution of wealth, as well as a more balanced industrial profile. While each party grew out of different contexts and institutions – on one side, trade unions and the material working class; on the other, environmental campaigns and the post material middle class – they shared these beliefs about economic intervention.

The differences between Labor and the Greens existed on two levels. Firstly, Greens politicians were, outside the tax, far more hostile to the mining industry

126 Ludlam, Scott, (28th of February 2017), personal interview.
itself. Where major party MPs sought to minimise the tax’s impact on business, Greens figures suggested that reduced investment might not be such a bad thing, considering the sector’s impact on climate change. Secondly, and more significantly, the two parties split over Labor’s decision to negotiate directly with mining companies, after the Minerals Council’s campaign against the RSPT. While both initially supported the original model, Labor was far more sensitive to its “sour” politics than the minor party. This mirrored the partisan dynamic in other difficult policy areas. Like carbon pricing and refugee politics, the two parties shared certain principles, but they were divided by different underlying approaches to politics, popularity and elections. According to a number of Labor politicians, the mining tax’s initial failure was partly its own fault. The party acted without political delicacy, and as a result it “barely survived” the ensuing battle.
CHAPTER EIGHT

A ‘red-green’ coalition? The future of Labor and Greens politics

On the 31st of May, 2016, the New Zealand Labour and Green parties announced an unprecedented peace, signing a “memorandum of understanding” in preparation for the nation’s 2017 election.\(^1\) After three consecutive losses to John Key and the National Party, the memorandum committed both parties to “working together in good faith and mutual trust” to defeat their conservative rivals.\(^2\) While not guaranteeing a formal coalition after the ballot, it opened the possibility for joint policy announcements, as well a coordinated campaign. Both parties agreed that the historic memorandum reflected a “newfound” strength and unity on the nation’s progressive left.\(^3\)

While signed in a different electoral context to Australia - the prominence of ‘list’ voting meant the parties competed less directly in New Zealand - local politicians noted the development. In the middle of his own federal campaign, Richard Di Natale compared the memorandum to the Australian relationship, which he thought looked irrational in contrast:

> “While the Australian Labor Party has been drumming up lies about dirty deals between the Liberals and the Greens, New Zealand Labour and the NZ Green Party have just entered into a signed working arrangement to bring more progressive policies into government for the benefit of the people of New Zealand.” \(^4\)

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Though the Australian relationship possessed little resemblance to the New Zealand one, it still preoccupied both parties in the months before the 2016 election. On top of the usual tussling over preference deals, Labor and Greens politicians discussed the prospect of another minority situation. In the early weeks of the campaign, Adam Bandt suggested that, if no major party gained an absolute majority in the election, he would “like to see Greens working with Labor”. The Member for Melbourne argued that all options should be left on the table, even the possibility of Greens ministers in a Labor Cabinet. Major party representatives, however, were much less enthusiastic about the idea. When asked about the proposal, Bill Shorten dismissed it outright. Paraphrasing *The Castle*, the Labor leader stated that, if the Greens harboured dreams of an alliance, they were “dreaming”.

This overture was not a novel suggestion in Australian politics. Some of Bandt’s proposals resembled the very ‘Agreement’ signed by the two parties after the 2010 election, just six years earlier. At the state level, coalitions occurred relatively frequently in Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory. But despite this, and before an election that nearly resulted in minority government, Shorten rejected the idea publicly and without caveat. The Labor leader even signed a pledge in *The Daily Telegraph*, committing the party to his course:

“I, Bill Shorten, as leader of the opposition, do solemnly promise not to enter into a deal or alliance with the Greens to form government if there is a hung parliament after the vote on July 2.”

This final chapter is about the future of the Labor and Greens relationship in Australia. In the interviews with both parties, politicians were asked about a

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potential ‘red-green’ arrangement. Should the relationship follow New Zealand’s example, with more political coordination and less public conflict? Or should it embody Shorten’s sentiment, with parties avoiding agreements and a closer association? In the long term, would we ever witness an alliance on the Australian left, mirroring the Coalition on its right? On these and related questions, the interviews asked Labor and Greens politicians about their preferences for the next era of progressive politics. Across the discussions, a relatively clear trend emerged, with Greens figures far more receptive to coalitions and closer relations than their Labor colleagues.

“I hate to tell you, but for me the Greens are the enemy”

When asked about the prospect of a future Labor and Greens alliance, Labor MPs overwhelmingly considered the idea unlikely, as well as undesirable. They generally viewed the Greens as a minor interest - sometimes the enemy, occasionally an ally - unworthy of equal billing with a party of government. Very few expressed an appetite for closer formal relations. As many MPs pointed out, the existing relationship was defined as much by competition as it was by cooperation. According to Chris Bowen, this undermined any hypothetical ‘coalition’ between the parties:

“The Greens don’t want to be in coalition with us, they want to replace us. We should have no truck with it. We should give it no support whatsoever. Now I don’t think they ever would replace us, but it’s what I think they’d like to do.”

Many Labor figures identified this latent sense of conflict, and a belief the Greens wanted to supplant their party; or as Bob Brown put it, “we don’t want to keep the bastards honest, we want to replace them”. Labor MPs felt this challenge most acutely during elections. The ongoing battle over ‘progressive’

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8 Bowen, Chris, (9th of December, 2015), personal interview.
seats, usually in the nation’s inner cities, produced a persistent, often powerful tension between the two groups. Even Labor MPs with some sympathy for Greens positions, like Anna Burke, felt the conflict:

“From a Labor perspective, they’re taking our seats. They’re not taking Liberal seats. And for us to form government, we need those seats. So at the end of the day, they might not want to be, but the Greens are a political party. I’ve said this in forums with people, I hate to tell you, but for me the Greens are the enemy. I get along brilliantly with all of them, but when we’re out there they paint us as the enemy as well. And if they want to become a bigger force, they need to knock us off. So I actually see it becoming more complicated and divisive over time.” 10

This was the most common Labor sentiment across the interviews. No cooperative arrangement could sustain itself, MPs claimed, if continuously eroded by internal competition. In contested electorates at least, the partisan equation was zero sum. Anthony Albanese relayed his personal experience in Grayndler, a Sydney seat which, over consecutive elections, the Greens targeted heavily:

"So much of what they do is just about politics, about getting people who vote Labor to vote Greens in selective seats. In my seat they had billboards throughout the electorate, they spent hundreds of thousands of dollars, they had full time staff, they had a campaign office on Parramatta Road ... If they had put a little bit of effort into the seat next door, Reid, a marginal seat, trying to change people who vote Liberal to voting Green, we could have won Reid. We would have been closer to government." 11

While Albanese retained Grayndler comfortably in 2016, the same area elected two state Greens representatives a year earlier. Clare O’Neil compared these battles to the more stable Liberal and National Coalition. Where the right wing parties structurally minimised conflict, the left did no such thing:

10 Burke, Anna, (11th of April, 2016), personal interview.
11 Albanese, Anthony, (9th of November, 2016), personal interview.
“The Greens business model is taking votes from Labor, so it’s hard to have that as your day-to-day goal in life, and then come to parliament and try to be in a collegiate, workable team, which is what a government looks like. So in the Liberals and Nationals, of course, they don’t compete against each other in local ballots, but all the Greens do is compete against Labor - that’s how they win. So it’s not a match made in heaven as it may seem from the outside.” 12

According to many Labor MPs, this was still the first and most significant barrier to closer relations. Unless the Greens reassessed their approach to politics, it was “very difficult for a cooperative relationship to be formed, when one party is trying to dramatically reduce the influence of the other”. 13 In Andrew Giles’ view, the Greens needed to ask themselves two questions: were they in parliament to “be a party of government”, or “to be an influence on government”; and did they view Labor as another major party enemy, or as a progressive ally to organise and work with? 14

Because of this, a number of Labor figures placed the onus for change on Greens politicians. If a future arrangement depended on shifts within the minor party, the Greens first needed to resolve their own internal debates. A number brought up its new leader, Richard Di Natale, and the allegedly pragmatic direction he was taking the party. Sue Lines suggested that, if successful, Di Natale might make the party more willing negotiators - and potentially more flexible parliamentary colleagues. 15 Laurie Ferguson thought the changes might split the party, dividing its activist base against a parliamentary faction seeking influence through compromise. 16 Labor MPs generally considered these questions undetermined, with their eventual resolution central to the relationship’s trajectory. But while some anticipated a change, there was also a sense that Di Natale’s leadership carried serious risks for the Greens. In Greg Combet’s eyes, a readjustment of purpose, a pivot towards compromise over advocacy, could undermine the minor party’s appeal:

12 O’Neil, Clare, (15th of March, 2016), personal interview.
13 Giles, Andrew, (16th of February, 2016), personal interview.
14 Ibid.
15 Lines, Sue, (16th of March, 2016), personal interview.
16 Ferguson, Laurie, (14th of March, 2016), personal interview.
“Richard Di Natale is taking the Greens seemingly in a bit more pragmatic direction, but I can see that’s full of risks for the Greens. If they become just another political party, rather than a protest movement, which is essentially what they are now, then they could lose political support from the group in the community that does support them - which is basically lots of young people and middle class progressive people.” 17

Combet’s analysis hinted at the difficulty of negotiating the space between ‘movement’ politics and electoral ambition. If the Greens wanted to expand their influence, they would invariably need to change their tactics. This was something Tanya Plibersek also observed. Labor’s deputy leader opposed a coalition, but doubted the same minority situation would arise again:

"I think the Greens have probably peaked in terms of their electoral influence. So the likelihood of us seeing a situation where they make up a significant enough part of the parliament to deserve to have a say like that, I don't actually see it. If they get one more seat, or two more seats in the next decade, I'd be surprised ... Because when you're a fair sized organisation, it's inevitable that you'll have conflict within your organisation, as well as with other organisations - and they manage it very badly. The factional fighting in New South Wales at the moment, the way they're leaking against each other ... Their brand is that they're not 'politics as usual'. I don't think there's anything more 'politics as usual' than factional fights and leaking against their colleagues." 18

Andrew Leigh agreed with this, but came to an even stronger conclusion. Like most minor parties in Australian history, Leigh thought the Greens were destined to rise and fall, collapsing under their internal contradictions. Because of this, Labor did not need to expend too much energy worrying about the long-term relationship:

“...My guess is that at some stage in my lifetime, the Greens will over compromise, be electorally wiped out, and the deals they’ve done in the

17 Combet, Greg, (2nd of May, 2016), personal interview.
18 Plibersek, Tanya, (2nd of March 2017), personal interview.
Senate will prevent them from returning. Effectively the deal they’ve done in the Senate pulls up the drawbridge on any small parties, they themselves could not have come into existence under the laws they’re now supporting." 19

A second concern articulated by Labor MPs, also related to this electoral dynamic, involved the impact of coalition politics on its caucus. Some figures feared that, if the two parties ever did establish a stable agreement, it would change the character of the Labor Party itself. As Cath Bowtell noted, the Liberal and National Coalition depended on an electoral division of labour - and so too would a left wing alliance. As the Nationals targeted rural voters and the Liberals targeted urban areas, Labor and the Greens would also need to partition territory:

“If [Labor and the Greens] were to say, electorally, we’re better off to have a progressive party with this branding to talk to the highly paid, highly educated voter who votes on the intelligentsia issues, the old cultural vote … and then we have a different branded party to talk to middle Australia - and then the two form a coalition. That's a model which potentially sees progressive politics get a better electoral outcome. And I can understand the math of that that says ‘the Greens have the old Labor heartland, and Labor campaigns for the middle’.” 20

According to Bowtell, however, this hypothetical only conveyed half the story, ignoring the ways an arrangement would recast Labor’s substantive agenda. This reflected a consistent Labor criticism of the Greens - that they only targeted Labor’s most progressive MPs, which in turn altered the shape of the major party. In Bowtell’s experience, constituent pressure in these seats motivated Labor to take more ‘left’ stances on a range of issues:

“[A coalition] means that Labor is then a centre party, not a left party. And I don’t want that for the Labor Party. So that’s why I don’t support that model. I see the logic of it, I see the attraction of it, a loose coalition or a

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19 Leigh, Andrew, (11th of March, 2016), personal interview.
20 Bowtell, Cath, (13th of April, 2016), personal interview.
formal coalition, but I just don’t see how it strengthens the Labor Party … You want someone in the Labor caucus saying ‘I don’t like the fact we have chaplains in schools, or my electorate is angry about our position on the internet filter’. And if that person isn’t in the Labor caucus, then I think it weakens the Labor caucus.” 21

Acknowledging Labor’s need to appeal to multiple, often diverse electorates, Bowtell’s analysis approximated the ‘old’ and ‘new’ left divide - with working class voters concerned about economic power and distribution, and middle class electors motivated by social liberalism.22 As she saw it, a coalition could divide these groups neatly, though in a way that damaged Labor’s broad appeal. Other MPs also sensed this dynamic, as well as its larger impact on Labor’s majoritarian project. Andrew Giles argued that the Greens push in urban seats like Melbourne - which Bowtell lost to Adam Bandt in 2010 - made Labor’s pitch to the ‘old’ left more difficult. In his view, the outsized attention given to Greens seats increased the distance between the social groups, both of whom were required to govern:

“[The contest over inner city seats] is really damaging and it is, in my view, antithetical to building the strongest centre-left position. It effectively forces the Labor Party to involve itself in two conversations: one arguing with someone whose tactical imperative is to take half a step left on any issue, and another to reach out to a different group of voters, to tell them a story which resonates with the reality of their lives. And the difficulty with the Melbourne style conversation is that it generally isn't a conversation about how government is formed or who should form government, it’s a conversation that’s very much located in particular circumstances of those electorates like Melbourne, which tend to be very post material, winners in the new economy. And I think, again, the challenge is not to exacerbate the gulf between material and post material voters, but to try and identify ways to bring those two sets together.” 23

21 Bowtell, Cath, (13th of April, 2016), personal interview.
23 Giles, Andrew, (16th of February, 2016), personal interview.
Originating in urban electorates, these concerns and hostilities were common across the interviews, present even among MPs insulated from the Greens threat. They were not, however, distributed evenly through the party. Political geography influenced attitudes, as some of its MPs admitted. Kelvin Thomson held the seat of Wills, an adjacent electorate to Melbourne, which faced an increasingly aggressive Greens challenge during his two decades in office. While he observed conflict among local activists, he witnessed different approaches in other parts of Victoria:

“In a place like the Brunswick branch of the Labor Party, a lot of people in that branch share a lot of positions with the Greens, but at the same time are deeply hostile to them. So it’s like a falling out between brothers, a Cain and Abel. But if you go out into the regions or other places, Labor Party people in those areas are far less troubled by the Greens. Because what happens if you’re in the seat of Ballarat, the Greens have about 5% of the vote, they have a much lesser percentage. And the fact that they have 5% and their people give us their preferences, whether the Greens want them to or not, they’re not regarded as a threat - they actually probably think it’s useful having in the field campaigning against the Liberals.”  

Laurie Ferguson agreed with Thomson, at least in his experience in Western Sydney. As the former Member for Werriwa, an electorate where the Greens vote hovered around 5%, Ferguson felt little animosity towards the minor party. In his experience, the dominant local sentiment towards the Greens was melancholy, especially when former party activists left to join it. This was very different to the ‘existential contest’ raging in the inner-city:

“I don’t think a lot of my party membership feel a degree of antipathy towards the Greens structurally. It’s not only a question of philosophy, it’s a question of structural reality. They’re not a threat to us, we see them as allies. Them staffing their polling booths is good for us, because people might preferentially come back. And because we live in a socially

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24 Thomson, Kelvin, (14th of April, 2016), personal interview.
conservative environment, compared to the inner city where it’s easy to be progressive on social issues, I feel a reasonable degree of affinity towards them and I think my party membership does. We don’t see them as enemies, as people to fight with.” 25

While inner city conflicts created animosity in much of the party, there was still some acceptance that Labor could not simply ignore the forces reshaping politics. A number acknowledged that political structures were changing - and that the growth of the Greens was one feature of a more complex political landscape. Bob Carr compared Labor’s situation to developments in European politics, which he characterised as the “breaking down of the party system”. He cited the 2016 Austrian Presidential election an example of these changes, when the populist right and environmentalist left competed in a final runoff.26 Wayne Swan identified a similar trend. Throughout the developed world, social, cultural and global forces were challenging the major party vote, though not always at the same pace as in Europe:

“There’s a fracturing and polarisation of traditional views and groups, you can only see a future with more parties, some of which will be ongoing, some of which will disappear … We live in a society where people are less traditionally oriented, beliefs are not necessarily transposed through family like they once were. Methods of communication are much more disparate … All those things mean that there’ll be greater fracturing of the political system over all, and that will put pressure on our traditional political structures.” 27

In Australia, this centrifugal force manifested itself on all sides of politics - in the growth of the Greens, the rise of populists like Clive Palmer and Nick Xenophon, the re-emergence of the nationalist One Nation, and the rising confidence of rural independents. Carr believed that, compared to its social democratic siblings in Europe, Australian Labor was holding its position relatively well. Future decisions, however, would depend on how far these trends progressed:

25 Ferguson, Laurie, (14th of March, 2016), personal interview.
26 Carr, Bob, (24th of May, 2016), personal interview.
27 Swan, Wayne, (10th of February, 2016), personal interview.
“You’ve got the Greens and Labor competition for inner city seats. That seems to be going the Greens way. However, where Labor has a strong local member, it can generally fight off a challenge. Labor might face a situation in the future where the Greens have pushed out past the inner city core, into inner-ring suburban seats, which have had a bit of gentrification - so the people with professional jobs living there, they might be social progressive, not inclined to vote conservative, and might be drawn to the Greens as an alternative to Labor. The issues is how quickly, if it all, the Greens will spread their footprint in the lower houses.” 28

As Carr acknowledged, the shape of parliament would influence Labor’s future interactions with the Greens. Even Labor figures expressing a strong desire to avoid minority government, like Gai Brodtmann, admitted that their respective power depended on electoral support. 29 With the Greens cementing their position in the nation’s inner cities, many accepted that Labor would need to respond strategically if it hoped to flourish. John Faulkner linked the rise of the Greens with his public campaign for democratic renewal within the Labor Party. In Faulkner’s eyes, an opaque internal culture was eroding the party’s activist base, and sapping its progressive zeal. The only way to reverse this downward trend, and in turn repel the Greens, was for Labor to reassert its values in a compelling way:

“The main approach that the Labor Party ought to adopt is to ensure it argues as clearly and as forcefully it can for the principles it believes in and the policies that it supports … It should have clear and strong political positions, it needs convictions and the courage of its convictions, and it needs to ensure that we do deal with those issues of internal party democracy and the like to ensure we attract new activists to its cause … I said recently that we’ve lost a generation of activists to the Greens, and we risk losing a generation of voters. And therein I think lies the risks for Labor, if it doesn’t behave in the way that I’ve talked about.” 30

28 Carr, Bob, (24th of May, 2016), personal interview.
29 Brodtmann, Gai, (21st of March, 2016), personal interview.
30 Faulkner, John, (26th of April, 2016), personal interview.
Other Labor figures thought the party should be cautious about emphasising classic ‘Greens’ issues, particularly those associated with ‘post material’ politics and social liberalism. In Bob Carr’s view, material issues resonated more in marginal seats, particularly around service provision in health and education, even if they were not policies animating wavering Greens voters:

“Governments are still made in the big suburban spaces of the big cities - and those electorates respond to a different set of issues to the inner city. Anyone campaigning on the centrality of same sex marriage in the outer suburbs of Sydney or Melbourne or Brisbane would be struggling for air. I’m not saying there would be hostility - but they want answers to a different set of problems.” 31

Other Labor strategies for dealing with the Greens emphasised parliament and the policy process, usually assuming some level of professional association between the parties. Greg Combet, for instance, thought Labor should conduct a productive relationship with the minor party while in government, particularly when values and policies overlapped. But rather than organise this association officially, Combet believed Labor could govern effectively without a formal arrangement:

“There’ll always be defining differences between the Greens and Labor, and I think for Labor in government, it’s just a matter of dealing with the Greens on a case-by-case basis. Where you may need their support to get something through, then you have to negotiate and discuss it with them … But where you can avoid entering into a formal alliance with them to form government, I’d certainly be avoiding it.” 32

Chris Bowen described such an arrangement as ‘transactional’, and also believed it represented the best path forward. But while he thought the parties shared “some commonalities”, allowing a degree of legislative cooperation, Bowen still

31 Carr, Bob, (24th of May, 2016), personal interview.
32 Combet, Greg, (2nd of May, 2016), personal interview.
predicted a combative relationship. Rather than cede ground, Bowen argued that Labor should articulate the minor party’s flaws:

“I think we should point out their inconsistencies on their positions on particular issues, but we should also fight on values. What the Greens have been good at doing is changing the debate onto values instead of particular issues, especially in the inner city … So I think we’ve got to be pretty clear on articulating our broad underlying values, and why we are the correct party of the progressive left, rather than always fighting them on specific issues, though we have to do that from time to time”.  

While most Labor MPs thought the party should ‘avoid’ formal arrangements wherever possible, there was a small minority that favoured closer relations. For these figures, the same trends that ‘fractured’ politics made Labor’s long-term parliamentary independence unlikely. As a result, some thought the kind of coalition politics witnessed in New Zealand would soon also become necessary in Australia. Melissa Parke expressed this position most forcefully, arguing that the two progressive parties could align in a similar fashion to the Coalition:

“One certainly never felt hostility towards the Greens. I’ve worked very well with Greens colleagues on a number of issues … I think inevitably we’ll have to have at least a coalition of convenience with the Greens, because more and more people are breaking away from the major parties. The Liberal Party is not able to get elected in its own right without the Nationals, and I don’t think Labor will be able to get elected without a coalition on the left - assuming we still want to be a party of the left, and I hope we do.”

Like Carr and Faulkner, Parke’s response to a Greens coalition overlapped with the party’s broader political choices and trajectory. From her perspective, the only way to beat the Greens, as well as animate an enthusiastic electoral majority, was to present a coherent and ambitious progressive agenda:

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33 Bowen, Chris, (9th of December, 2015), personal interview.
34 Parke, Melissa, (22nd of March, 2016), personal interview.
“I don’t think we can really win when we try to ‘out-right’ the right, it doesn’t work. We can only win when we’re more progressive, as Kevin Rudd showed in 2007. It’s when we back away from those progressive views that we lose a lot of supporters. So I think there will need to be [a relationship] whether it’s a happy or unhappy coalition I can’t say.” 35

Ged Kearney, the President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, also thought a healthy relationship benefited the broader left. This was because the Greens influenced Labor politics and governments in various useful ways. Kearney’s only fear was that, in the minor party’s search for influence and votes, it risked losing its strong progressive voice:

“If I were to be perfectly honest about the politics of the Labor Party, I think they’ve been dragged to the centre more and more and more, and they need a flank. In my opinion, there needs to be something pulling us all back, and I think it’s great that the Greens are there, I think it’s really great … So I think they play an incredibly important role, and I just really hope they don’t get too pragmatic in the interests of wanting to be governing with anyone in a formal coalition - I’d hate to think they would do a conservative-green coalition.” 36

Other figures sympathetic to closer relations were more muted than Parke, recognising that any detente was still vulnerable to tension and conflict. Sue Lines admitted that the “Labor and Greens voting community” desired less hostile relations, but thought it was doubtful while the minor party retained its electoral ambition. 37 Lisa Singh also supported a “more sensible, as opposed to combative approach”. She did, however, place caveats on the desire:

“I think at the moment there’s still a lot of competitiveness that goes on between both sides, between Labor and the Greens. There are some core values that we both agree on as two parties and you would hope that would give reason for the relationship to improve over time. Having said that, I wouldn’t like the Greens to get any bigger. I think that they’re useful, as a

35 Ibid.
36 Kearney, Ged, (14th of April, 2016), personal interview.
37 Lines, Sue, (16th of March, 2016), personal interview.
minor party, but I think really the Labor Party is obviously there to govern.”

This sentiment was overwhelmed by MPs who saw the Greens as an ominous and hungry threat to Labor. If an aversion to coalition politics could be traced through Labor history, then this independent streak was present in the interviews. Most considered a future alliance extremely unlikely, particularly under current conditions. For these MPs, the kind of cooperative arrangement pursued in New Zealand was impossible while the Greens continued to actively pursue Labor seats. While some figures did acknowledge shifts in the party system, challenging established political structures, few expressed interest in an alliance, formal or otherwise. While not unanimous, majority opinion agreed with Anna Burke, though some were more conflicted than others. “I hate to tell you, but for me the Greens are the enemy”.

“I take the long view”: Greens on the future

If the majority of Labor MPs opposed closer relations with the minor party, and a formal coalition in particular, then the Greens interviews revealed a different view. Compared with Labor, Greens politicians were far more receptive to a tighter arrangement, with many seeing it as the inevitable evolution of left politics. A majority thought that, “if Labor and the Greens could get on with each other”, it would be “much better for the implementation of progressive values in Australia”.

According to Ellen Sandell, some form of agreement could consolidate the parliamentary left:

“The Labor Party needs to realise that the Greens aren’t going anywhere, and instead work with us. Together we can be a powerful force. And in some states they’ve done that. So in the ACT, there’s a power sharing agreement, where Labor and the Greens are in coalition, with a Greens minister in cabinet. My understanding is that Labor in the ACT is quite progressive, and they’ve looked at it pragmatically and said ‘if we continue

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38 Singh, Lisa, (20th of April, 2016), personal interview.
39 Rice, Janet, (11th of April, 2016), personal interview.
to work with the Greens we can shut out the conservatives for a very long time”.

While based on a different voting method - under the ACT’s ‘Hare Clark’ system, multi member districts meant the two parties competed less directly than in most jurisdictions - she considered the Territory's arrangement a good model for future relations. The Victorian MLA compared it favourably to politics in her state, where Labor pre-emptively ruled out an agreement between the parties:

“In Victoria, the Premier went out and said he would never ever do a deal with the Greens. Well that’s a pretty silly thing to say, because if we’re in a balance of power, is he willing to give up the premiership and give it to the Liberals just out of spite? I think instead they should look and say, “well the Greens are here, they’re always going to take some seats, let’s figure out what we can work together on”. It might not be as formalised as the Liberals and Nationals coalition, but they’ve got a pretty stable agreement, and every now and then they have to fight it out in a seat, but then when they walk back into parliament they work together again.”

The ACT situation was at the formal end of models suggested by Greens politicians, incorporating an official power sharing agreement, as well as a combined cabinet. Shane Rattenbury, the Greens MLA who spent four years in that ministry, agreed with Sandell, judging the arrangement an “effective” prototype for progressive politics. While not without its issues, particularly for a minor party trying to position itself as independent, he considered the experiment a success:

“If the Greens vote continues to grow, which we obviously hope and believe it will, there will be an inevitability about the fact the Greens and ALP will need to work together. And I would say we’ve been able to demonstrate an effective working model here. I would encourage both my

40 Sandell, Ellen, (11th of April, 2016), personal interview.
41 Sandell, Ellen, (11th of April, 2016), personal interview.
42 Rattenbury, Shane, (2nd of June 2016), personal interview.
federal colleagues and the ALP’s federal members to reflect on it a little bit - you can make a positive and constructive government.” 43

Scott Ludlam was also open to the idea. At the very least, there were “people in that [Labor] party room who we work really productively with”, and would continue to do so in the future. In his view, however, a parliamentary coalition would require a specific set of conditions:

"I think it's a path we definitely could go down. Depending on the political environment, the state of the world ... I'm not trying to be cagey, I just feel like there are so many variables that are in play under those circumstances. Who are you signing an agreement with? What are their policies on climate? I'm not interested in being part of a government that's running concentration camps in the Pacific, I'd rather be outside the room hurling rocks at it to be perfectly frank ... But by all means, I'm with Adam. We're not here to be a fringe protest movement, we're here to shape policy and the political environment.” 44

Other Greens proposals were less formal, though they still sought to streamline certain partisan decisions. Jaime Parker believed that, through greater cooperation, Labor and the Greens could conduct more efficient election campaigns. This engaged with a claim made by Labor figures such as Anthony Albanese - that the heat generated by inner city campaigns diverted resources from marginal seats needed to form majorities. While Parker acknowledged that elections would always create “disputes and tussles”, he thought the two parties could rationalise their efforts:

“I think our number one objective is to make sure that we don’t have the conservatives there. So what I would be doing - and I know that there’s some steps towards this - is working with people in state Labor and independents and others to see what are the seats where we could work together to beat Nationals and Liberals. How do we work together to do that? Is there a strong independent to support, or is there a strong Labor candidate that we really need to build a campaign to support or vice versa?

43 Rattenbury, Shane, (2nd of June 2016), personal interview.
44 Ludlam, Scott, (28th of February 2017), personal interview.
So we don’t run a joint ticket, it’s more strategic than anything else. I think more effort should be put into the strategic relationship to get better outcomes. And I think that will help build relationships between the parties. Of course, in the inner cities and the north coast, it’s a bit tense, because we’ve won seats off them - but across the state, there’s good opportunities to see how we could collaborate.” 45

Where major party MPs considered the Greens expansion a direct attack on their caucus, as well as the largest barrier to closer relations, Greens politicians were more likely to view it as the unavoidable reality of their profession. While some acknowledged that a left coalition would require a more nuanced election strategy - as Rattenbury admitted, it took a level of maturity that was “not always easy” in politics - most Greens figures accepted that the parties could not escape some degree of electoral conflict. 46 In Lee Rhiannon’s memory, Labor had been uncomfortable with the Greens challenge since the party’s formation:

“When I first saw it - and I could understand it, though I thought it was wrong - was when I joined the Greens in 1990. Jeanette McHugh was the first Labor left woman in the House of Representatives. She covered the federal seat of Philip, which became the seat of Grayndler. And Labor people were besides themselves that we’d even stand against her, and that’s what you still get today. All this stuff that you shouldn’t challenge Tanya, you shouldn’t challenge ‘Albo’, go off to some other seat. Well politics doesn’t work like that. That’s where our groups are strong, where Labor is strong, that’s how it is.” 47

In Rhiannon’s view, Labor had still not adjusted to “the Greens being part of the political landscape”. This resistance meant that, from her perspective, “by far the biggest problem [for the relationship] is with Labor”. This was a relatively common sentiment among Greens MPs. As Janet Rice put it, “we don’t throw nearly as much mud as Labor does”. 48 A number referenced the intense debate over Senate voting in April 2016, citing it as proof of the asymmetrical hostility.

45 Parker, Jamie, (24th of May, 2016), personal interview.
46 Rattenbury, Shane, (2nd of June 2016), personal interview.
47 Rhiannon, Lee, (16th of March, 2016), personal interview.
48 Rice, Janet, (11th of April, 2016), personal interview.
Because of this, Greens figures often placed the burden for change on the major party. When the minority government ended, Adam Bandt observed a concerted push within Labor to distance itself from the Greens:

“Since [the hung parliament] the right of the Labor Party has spoken out and said “we’ll never enter an arrangement with the Greens ever again” ... now whether what’s said in the flushes of coming out of a minority parliament ends up being the considered view of a Labor Party that might find itself in a minority parliament and want to get itself onto the Treasury benches, that remains to be seen. It’s telling that there are those in Labor who are saying they don’t want to work with the Greens again - I suspect they never did in the first place - because they’re far closer to the Liberals than they are to us.

I think ultimately this is a question Labor is going to need to resolve, because I think the Greens, certainly from my perspective, I would be prepared to work with Labor again in a similar arrangement or a different arrangement, we can have the discussion about what it should look like. But if we’re going to be met with Labor saying “we’ll govern alone or not at all, thank you very much”, then that will make for an interesting minority parliament.” 49

This greater acceptance of coalition politics was perhaps unsurprising, at least in terms of each party’s immediate interest. As a smaller organisation than Labor, with little history in government, coalition politics expanded rather than diluted the party’s parliamentary influence; and at this point, electoral competition generally increased the size of its caucus. Like Bandt, Richard Di Natale argued that the most important change would be in Labor’s attitude towards other parties.

“I don’t think a lot about the Labor and Greens relationship because, ultimately, it’s a question for the Labor Party to resolve. The Labor Party are hopelessly conflicted about their relationship with us. There are many good people inside the Labor Party who share the views that we hold - in fact I suspect that there a few people inside the Labor Party who would

49 Bandt, Adam, (15th of March, 2016), personal interview.
be much more at home inside the Greens than inside the Labor Party … So you have people like that, who strongly support a more cooperative relationship, and then you have other people inside the Labor Party who believe that the Greens are their sworn enemy - and I could name a handful of them. Now until the Labor Party resolve their internal tension it’s really a moot point for us. What we need to do is put forward a positive policy agenda, to work with whoever is supportive of that agenda, and to get those policies implemented, and I think over time that issue will resolve itself.” 50

Being open to “whoever is supportive of the Greens agenda”, Di Natale hinted at a second thread within the party’s interviews. Echoing their leader, some Greens figures suggested that the ALP relationship was a secondary consideration, with the party’s future far less entwined with Labor than the question implied. According to Rachel Siewert, Labor only played a minor role in her mental picture of Greens politics.51 Di Natale expressed this publicly in 2016, when he told GQ magazine that he would “never say never” to working with the Liberal and National parties. “In my view it’s much more likely that the opportunity rests with Labor”, he told the magazine, “but you should never rule out any possibility, though it’s unlikely”.52 According to Sarah Hanson Young, the party needed to be wary about hitching itself to any one party:

“I’ve always believed - I’m less ideological about this - that we all come to this place with our principle and within our parties, but ultimately our job is to try and get as many outcomes as we can, and improve legislation and put in place better laws. We’re not going to agree on everything, but I think that across all sides - I don’t think it’s just about the Labor Party and I don’t think it’s about saying no to the Liberals all the time either. You’ve got to take policy on its merit.” 53

50 Di Natale, Richard, (20th of April, 2016), personal interview.
51 Seiwert, Rachel, (12th of September, 2016), personal interview.
53 Hanson Young, Sarah, (10th of October, 2016), personal interview.
Hanson Young’s ambivalence towards the Labor relationship stemmed from what she saw as a rightward trend in its politics. She agreed with the ‘convergence’ thesis, that the major parties increasingly resembled ‘tweedledum and tweedledee’. 54 From her perspective, this produced a relatively small overlap between Labor and the Greens:

“I’m finding it more and more difficult, to be honest, to find areas where we can just say ‘well of course we agree with the Labor Party on that’. As the Labor Party has become more and more similar to the Liberal Party, the Greens have ended up being more defined in terms of the issues we talk about. Labor members sometimes get upset about that, you hear talk that we’re ‘cannibalising’ the Labor Party - no, I’m just standing for the things I’ve always stood for, and trying to listen to the progressive voters in Australia who desperately want a progressive voice in the parliament and don’t see it from the Labor Party.” 55

While Hanson Young was less supportive of a Labor arrangement than other Greens, she did agree with them on an important point - that the oncoming party system would look very different to the bipartisan model. Though certain Labor MPs identified structural changes moving through party politics, this idea emerged more consistently throughout the Greens interviews. According to Di Natale, the trends were clear:

“People in this place get very focussed on what’s happening here and now, and people don’t look at long term trends. The support base for both the old parties is shrinking, it’s shrinking year on year. Partly that’s because it’s become a less tribal business - that voter identity, “my dad was a Labor or Liberal voter, my grandmother was a Labor or Liberal voter” - that stuff is breaking down. We have a generation who doesn’t identify strongly with any political party. The vote for the other group, the non-major party group, is growing and it’s growing consistently over time, and it will continue to happen. There’s no sign that the trend will change.” 56

55 Ibid.
56 Di Natale, Richard, (20th of April, 2016), personal interview.
In contrast to Labor politicians, many who perceived a lost Greens momentum, minor party figures claimed that politics was recalibrating in their favour. They argued that, while Labor could currently ignore and denounce it, that might not be possible after future election. According to Di Natale, demographics were moving in the Greens direction:

“If you look at the Greens support base, it’s very strong in the under thirty age group. I suspect if there was an election for people just under 30 we’d be in a contest to potentially be the next government of the country … So even just basic demographics will tell you that as those cohorts move through the population over time our vote will continue to increase and I believe that there will come a time when the old parties need to actually resolve that question about their relationship with the Greens - because they might not be able to form government without us.”  

From Di Natale’s perspective, these trends would ideally produce a multi party system of government. As major parties lost their dominance, political influence would spread throughout the system, with parliamentary power more commensurate to electoral support. Christine Milne agreed, suggesting that any Labor attempt to stop the tide was destined to fail:

“We need to move to a multi party form of governance like we have in Europe. The two party system is breaking down. It’s broken down in the UK - the Liberal Democrats broke it down there. It is breaking down everywhere. I mean the Coalition is a coalition - it’s the Liberals and the Nationals. The reality is, we have got multi party representation in parliament … So I think Labor is harking back to a so called golden age of the two party system with majority governments, and I think that that age is over. And I think that it’s even more clear that it will never be restored in the long term - unless they want to try and change the electoral system to make it so.”

Milne compared the situation to Tasmania, whose party system witnessed the same kinds of birthing pain over a decade earlier. Even if Labor rejected a

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57 Di Natale, Richard, (20th of April, 2016), personal interview.
58 Milne, Christine, (9th of August, 2016), personal interview.
coalition while in opposition, the state of parliament would ultimately shape their decision:

“I take the long view - and you just go back to what happened in Tasmania - Labor had no hope of government, they got government thanks to the Labor and Green Accord. After that they lost government and blamed it on the Accord, the fact that they governed with the support of the Greens, which lead them to this view that they would never ever govern with the Greens again. Until of course they did, and put Greens in cabinet. What happens in Tasmania is very often a forerunner to what happens nationally.” 59

If politics was trending towards a more multi polar model, then some Greens figures acknowledged that a closer arrangement was only the beginning of its negotiations with Labor. The party’s ability to assert itself beyond a marginal status, and wield genuine influence in parliament, would depend on electoral support. According to Tim Hollo, the party should be ambitious, looking to win a dozen or more seats in the House of Representatives:

“I would like to see a situation where the Greens can be winning not just one, two or three, but many seats in the lower house - and I think that is entirely possible. We have in the Senate a pretty reasonable balance now. The Greens Senate representation is very, very serious, particularly with their intellectual heft and the work that they do, ten out of 76 seats, with Labor having thirty odd … I don’t think we will get to a situation where Labor and the Greens can have the kind of strong working political relationship for coalition government until we get closer to that kind of balance in lower house representation. That’s where I think the Greens need to strategically head to a situation of not just winning one, two or three, but fifteen to twenty in the lower house. And once you have that kind of strength of representation, there’s no chance that Labor can treat you in the way that Labor has treated us in the past. Then it will be a very serious balance of power, it was an imbalance of power previously.” 60

59 Ibid.
60 Hollo, Tim, (16th of May, 2016), personal interview.
While this remained a dream, Greens politicians were at this point more open to a closer arrangement than their Labor colleagues. Adam Bandt’s proposal - of a more integrated ‘red-green’ government, with a potentially mixed ministry - gained support in much of the parliamentary party. While some suggested a less formal arrangement, most desired more cooperation, and less hostility between the two parties. There was also a sense of inexorability around the ‘multi party’ model, with social, political and economic trends eroding the major party vote. If these tendencies continued, many Greens politicians agreed with Shane Rattenbury - that there was “an inevitability about the fact the Greens and ALP will need to work together”. 61

Conclusion

Across the interviews, Labor and the Greens figures revealed different institutional perspectives on a hypothetical coalition. Labor representatives generally considered the prospect unwelcome, even farfetched. The two parties were already too antagonistic, they argued, too structurally opposed to produce a “collegiate, workable team, which is what a government looks like”. 62 While some conceded that a level of parliamentary cooperation would be necessary, most thought the party should avoid formal arrangements in the future. Greens politicians were much more positive about the idea. Though not a unanimously held position, most thought a more harmonious relationship would consolidate the parliamentary left, facilitate new ideas, and produce more progressive governments.

Within this broad discussion, Labor and Greens politicians clashed on two underlying points. The first involved electoral competition between the parties. Labor politicians claimed that the Greens’ expansion, particularly in inner city seats, represented a direct attack on its caucus; producing a latent tension between the groups, as well as moving resources away from the marginal seats deciding government. This was amplified in the left of the Labor Party, whose

61 Rattenbury, Shane, (2nd of June 2016), personal interview.
62 O’Neil, Clare, (15th of March, 2016), personal interview.
MPs often faced the strongest minor party challenges. Greens figures, however, interpreted these battles differently. Rather than malicious confrontations, Greens MPs positioned them within the political logic of single member districts. They had no real choice, they argued. Sites of concentrated Greens popularity coincided with progressive Labor seats, their clearest chance to extend the party’s influence. “That’s where our groups are strong, where Labor is strong, that’s how it is.”

The second disagreement was over the deeper future of party politics in Australia. Across the interviews, a number of Greens MPs expressed a belief that structural changes to politics, particularly the erosion of “tribal loyalties” attached to major parties, were conducive to minor party success. Its representatives embraced a ‘multi party’ world, arguing that any attempt to “hark back to a so called golden age of the two party system” would fail. While some Labor figures acknowledged that party politics was changing, with greater pressure on the major parties, they challenged the narrative of Greens inevitability. As many of them saw it, the minor party had reached a plateau, with future gains made difficult by internal conflict, its approach to legislation and compromise, and the leadership of Richard Di Natale.

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63 Rhiannon, Lee, (16th of March, 2016), personal interview.
CONCLUSION

“Certainly the impotent are pure”

When Labor and Greens figures quarrelled over Gough Whitlam’s legacy, it was possible to dismiss it as a routine, if insensitively timed dispute between competing parties. But underpinning these conflicting memorials was a deeper disagreement. When Labor politicians discussed Whitlam, they generally remembered two things. Like the Greens, they celebrated his restless and ambitious policy agenda - his expansion of public health care, his investment in suburban amenities, his early support for indigenous land rights and feminism. But they also recalled a second side of his political career. This was his time in opposition, confronting the hard left in Victoria. One of Whitlam’s greatest achievements, they argued, was making Labor electable again, after twenty three years in the electoral wilderness. Their memory of Whitlam was not simply an idealist, but a politician who coveted, secured and then employed executive power. They captured this in his famous quote, addressed to the Victorian branch in 1967, but now redirected at the contemporary Greens:

“We construct a philosophy of failure, which finds in defeat a form of justification and a proof of the purity of our principle. Certainly, the impotent are pure … There is nothing more disloyal to the traditions of Labor than the heresy that power is not important or that the attainment of political power is not fundamental to our purposes”.

When Kirchheimer identified the ‘catch all’ party, he used the term critically. In the pursuit of office, parties were losing something essential; their mass structure, their class base, their transformative mission. Greens representatives shared Kirchheimer’s lament. As Jaime Parker put it, life was “too short” to compromise on beliefs in the hope of electoral gain. Parties needed to lead, not

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1 Giles, Andrew, (16th of February, 2016), personal interview.
4 Parker, Jamie, (24th of May, 2016), personal interview.
simply “blow in the wind”.

Labor politicians interpreted the ‘catch all’ model differently. They considered the Greens critique immature, an abdication of the responsibility to win and hold office. “To make a difference in government, you have to form government, and the Greens can’t do that”. Aggregating interests in a diffuse society was difficult, “much more complex than representing a small minority”, but it was nonetheless necessary to achieve progressive goals.

These different approaches to politics, between the imperatives of ‘office seeking’ and ‘policy seeking’ parties, permeated the research. When asked why they joined Labor over an alternative like the Greens, Labor MPs invoked the opportunities of executive government. Politics was not about “saying interesting things”, it was about “changing the world”. These different assumptions also shaped the policy disputes examined in the thesis. On climate change, Labor’s emphasis on industry consultation, as well as its pursuit of bipartisan consensus, split the two parties during the first term debate. According to the Greens, the government’s desire to appease stakeholders, even hostile ones, weakened the scheme to the point where it failed to meet climate change’s enormous challenge. In return, when the Greens eventually voted against the legislation, Labor claimed it as proof of the minor party’s fatal weakness, its doctrinaire aversion to incremental progress. In Labor’s view, the Greens decision was a clear instance where purity produced impotence.

Refugee policy divided the parties, often viciously. It also reflected these different attitudes towards policy, popular sentiment and elections. Across two terms in office, Labor changed its stance, first ending the ‘Pacific solution’ in 2008, before in later years embracing a series of deterrence measures. Greens politicians argued that Labor did this for electoral reasons, shifting with the preferences of marginal electorates. While Labor figures claimed that this simplified a challenging moral situation - particularly with the deaths of refugees

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5 Sandell, Ellen, (11th of April, 2016), personal interview.
6 O’Neil, Clare, (15th of March, 2016), personal interview.
7 McAllister, Jenny, (11th of October, 2016), personal interview.
9 Leigh, Andrew, (11th of March, 2016), personal interview.
at sea - they also argued that Labor faced a more complex political dynamic than the more homogenous Greens. Labor was positioned between the desires of cosmopolitan progressives and parts of the working class, whose support was necessary for Labor to hold government. A similar dynamic could be traced in the resource taxation debate. After Julia Gillard became Prime Minister, Greens politicians suggested that Labor diluted its original proposal because of industry campaigning and its growing electoral consequences. While Labor did not necessarily reject this point, its politicians interpreted the situation differently. According to Labor MPs, the change did follow the hostile campaign, but also its failure to develop, consult and promote its initial policy. Both provided lessons for future Labor governments.

While these broad orientations towards politics and political change represented the most persistent division between Labor and the Greens, substantive and ideological disputes did influence the relationship in certain ways. The first was the so called ‘job versus the environment dilemma’; the clash of interests between organised labour and conservationists. On climate change, different priorities around industry viability and immediate emissions reduction produced disagreements over the scheme’s starting price, as well as the amount of assistance it granted vulnerable businesses. According to Greg Combet, Labor feared an overly aggressive Greens scheme, which could have “put tens of thousands of people out of job, who are working class people and who would be severely disadvantaged.” But even with these different motivations, the ‘dilemma’ was not irreconcilable. Through collaborative mechanisms such as the Multi Party Committee on Climate Change, Labor, the Greens and independents eventually agreed to the Clean Energy Act; with both parties compromising at different points. When the legislation reached parliament, the main political disagreement was between left and right parties, not representatives of labour and environmentalism.

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10 Combet, Greg, (2nd of May, 2016), personal interview.
The second substantive difference involved the ‘post material’ dynamic identified by Inglehart and other scholars. As this research predicted, Greens politicians were much more comfortable with the ‘new politics’ than Labor representatives. This was most visible in refugee policy. Across Labor’s six years in office, the Greens consistently presented a “multiculturalist-universalist” position, rejecting any move towards offshore processing. The party opposed the government’s response to the MV Oceanic Viking, its Malaysia Solution and its eventual Papua New Guinea scheme. Labor’s history with asylum policy was much more conflicted. While it entered office with a humanitarian critique of John Howard’s regime - which “punished refugees for domestic political purposes” - it ended with an equally prohibitive arrangement. As the post material literature suggested, Labor’s decisions were made in the context of the “mixed preferences of the mainstream Left electorate”. Julia Gillard called this Labor’s “dual constituency” problem. Because Labor was situated between “progressive activists who want a compassionate approach” and its “traditional blue collar constituency who are unnerved by boat arrivals”, it struggled to satisfy both parts of its electoral coalition. Labor struggled to do this, and refugee policy represented the relationship’s most intractable conflict across the government.

Chapters five, six and seven focused on particularly troubling policy areas for the ‘Agreement’, inevitably suggesting a pessimistic image of Labor and Greens cooperation. But withstanding these difficulties, the interviews revealed a relatively positive view of Julia Gillard’s experiment in minority government. This was the first federal attempt at formal Labor and Greens relations, and the majority of representatives considered it a policy success; progressive, ambitious

and productive in parliament. Both parties cited similar achievements - reforms to disability insurance, education funding, carbon pricing, internet infrastructure - and both claimed to bring something distinctive to the arrangement. Labor MPs suggested that, more than the conservative Coalition, the party was uniquely capable of navigating the more complex parliamentary environment. This was embodied in Julia Gillard’s leadership, they suggested, whose egalitarianism and professional history suited an era of negotiation and compromise. For their part, Greens politicians enjoyed the closer proximity to executive power. To the extent the government was “more ambitious than usual”, the minor party claimed its share of credit, attributing much of its progressive momentum to their leverage and influence.16 While this frustrated Labor MPs, there was a sense across both parties that Julia Gillard left Australia in a better state than she found it.

These positive memories of minority government emphasised parliamentary savvy and legislative success. But even with these considerable victories, the minority government ended in clear electoral failure for both parties. Labor’s primary vote fell from 38% in 2010 to 33% in 2013; the Greens lost over a third of its Senate vote in the same period of time. Tony Abbott, the Agreement’s most relentless critic, won office with a considerable majority. As John Faulkner put it, “if it was such a triumph, why was Labor wiped out at the subsequent election?” 17 This awkward political fact produced a skepticism towards the arrangement amongst certain, particularly Labor representatives, with many claiming that the ‘Agreement’ contributed to the party’s unpopularity. They cited three main reasons for this: that it sat awkwardly within the Australian political tradition, where majority government represented the “natural order”; that it intensified Labor’s association with the Greens, which repelled swing voters; and that it demanded policy compromises which, like the fixed carbon price, undermined Labor’s earlier promises. While none of these suggested that the ‘Agreement’ was a policy failure, a group within Labor believed that “it would

16 Milne, Christine, (9th of August, 2016), personal interview.
17 Faulkner, John, (26th of April, 2016), personal interview.
have been best to have avoided such a deal”. Rather than establishing formal ties, the party should have negotiated with the Greens on individual bills.18

To return to this research’s initial curiosity: were we witnessing the creation of a left bloc in Australian politics, to mirror the established Coalition on its right? From the interviews at least, the answer appeared to be no. When asked, many Labor figures considered the idea amusing. There was little sense that the party was considering the prospect seriously, or that it was seen as plausible. Most Labor representatives still viewed the Greens primarily as a competitor. In their view, a more cooperative relationship would only be possible with a different electoral dynamic. As things currently stood, “so much of what they do is ... about getting people who vote Labor to vote Green”, with the minor party directing most of its resources towards inner city Labor seats.19 The Greens were much more open to the idea of closer, more integrated relations, but on Labor’s electoral complaint they held firm: electoral competition was the unavoidable nature of politics, they argued, and major parties did not deserve immunity from popular challengers. As Shane Rattenbury admitted, if Labor and the Greens were going to develop a more harmonious arrangement, both sides would need to establish a greater “maturity” around electoral competition and parliamentary cooperation.20

While these tensions persist, Australian party history suggests that Labor’s electoral fortunes will remain entangled with the smaller parties around it. Preference deals can make elections more difficult - and hostility in parliament can encumber Labor governments. In recent decades, centrifugal forces have reshaped the party system, with the major party vote declining steadily. While this is subject to change, it remains the dominant trend in Australian party politics - something politicians from both parties acknowledged. Because of this, the Labor and Greens relationship is significant, even if figures in each party wish it was otherwise.

18 Carr, Bob, (24th of May, 2016), personal interview.
19 Albanese, Anthony, (9th of November, 2016), personal interview.
20 Rattenbury, Shane, (2nd of June 2016), personal interview.
With this in mind, the research suggests a number of things for both parties to consider going forward. Some of these involve structural difficulties facing any potential arrangement. Labor and the Greens are not supported by identical social groups, and competing impulses around employment and conservation, as well as different dynamics around ‘post material’ policies, will continue to strain interactions around ‘new politics’ issues. Underpinning these considerations is the most pervasive difference in the relationship: the difference between ‘office seeking’ and ‘policy seeking’ parties, with their distinct attitudes towards policy, parliament and elections.

While any future arrangement will need to negotiate these differences more actively, the 43rd federal parliament of Australia did show that Labor and the Greens could produce meaningful policy in a cooperative setting. The Greens supported the multi party model, and tempered their demands in order to achieve progressive outcomes. Labor successfully incorporated minority interests into the political process, navigating a considerable agenda through parliament. In Julia Gillard’s memory, it was a prolific arrangement at the very least:

“Minority government delivered the nation effective and stable government. This was the most productive parliament, able to deal with the hardest of issues. During the term of my government, members of parliament sat for more than 1555 hours and 566 pieces of legislation were passed. This is more legislation than was passed in the last term of the Howard government, notwithstanding their complete control of the parliament, with a majority in the House of Representatives and the Senate”.  

Of all the lessons from the minority experiment, this was perhaps the most important. For most of the term, Labor and the Greens were able to engage in good faith, enacting shared principles and promoting progressive legislation. If this really was the shape of parliaments to come, neither party should necessarily fear it.

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