

“BOUND TO BE RESPONSIBLE”: THE TASMANIAN GREENS’ AND THE 1996-1998 LIBERAL MINORITY GOVERNMENT

Arabella Comyn
Wageningen University and Research

Abstract

This paper presents a case study of minority government in the Australian state of Tasmania in 1996-1998. The minority government was led by the conservative Liberal Party of Australia and supported, without a formal agreement or formal arrangements, by the newly formed Tasmanian Green Party. This type of minority government is not very common in Australia and was adopted as a result of the specific context within which the government was formed. Two of the Green members elected to the Tasmanian parliament participated in extensive interviews which provide the primary basis for this case study.

The case study will show how the negativity ascribed to the Tasmanian Greens and minority government prevented the possibility of a written agreement for minority government. It will also outline how the unity-distinctiveness dilemma was experienced by the Tasmanian Greens and how it played a role in the government’s early end. The case shows that the Tasmanian Greens displayed a high commitment to stability and cooperative politics, but that this was not enough to prevent the governing Liberal Party from calling an early election and breaking a promise. The participating ex-Greens did however find the experience to be ‘worth it’.

I. Introduction

The case study presented in this paper represents an uncommon occurrence in Australian politics: a minority government with no formal support arrangements. Of additional interest is the fact that the minority government in question, which lasted from 1996-1998, was led by a conservative party with the support of a green party. The Liberal Party of Australia is the more conservative of Australia’s two major parties and was the incumbent in the 1996 state election. When this election produced a hung parliament with the Tasmanian greens in balance of power, they were compelled to form government. The Liberals refused to negotiate the model of minority government. The Tasmanian Greens felt ‘bound to be responsible’ and thus agreed to support the Liberal minority government without concessions or formal mechanisms (Putt 2020 personal interview).

This case outlines how the context of the 1996 Tasmanian election prevented the

possibility of a written agreement for minority government. It begins with an outline of the context of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Greens. The minority government formation period will then be detailed, followed by an outline of three aspects of the period of parliament. The early end of the government will then be presented as it relates to two pieces of legislation.

II. Methods

The case presented in this paper was developed as part of a Masters’ thesis examining how the Australian Greens shape and experience sub-national minority government. It was one of four cases and represents an uncommon model of minority government in Australia. This case was developed using a combination of literature and document reviews and insider interviews. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner with two of the four Tasmanian Green members in the 1996-1998 Tasmanian parliament. This combination of methods

provided triangulation that enabled gaps in memory and perspective to be addressed. Some interview responses included confidential matters and so the transcripts have been kept private on the server of the Wageningen University and Research department of Public Administration and Policy. Christine Milne was interviewed three times (1), and Peg Putt was interviewed twice (2). Other Green Members of Parliament, each interviewed twice for a case study of the Tasmanian parliament 2010-2014, also made comments relevant to this case (Nick McKim (3), Tim Morris (4), Cassy O'Connor (5) and Paul O'Halloran(6)).

III. Tasmania, minority government and the Greens

Tasmania is one of six states and two territories that make up the Federation of Australia. It maintains a bicameral parliament composed of the House of Assembly, the Lower House, and the Legislative Council, the Upper House. The lower house is elected using the Hare Clark system of proportional representation, while the largely non-partisan upper house is elected using a majoritarian system (Parliament of Tasmania Computer Services 2019). Proportional representation systems are employed in multi-member electorates and elect candidates 'in proportion to the number of votes they receive,' thus tending to elect a greater number of minor party and independent candidates than other systems (Electoral Commission of Australia and New Zealand 2018). As the Tasmanian government is formed from the Lower House the electoral system of the Legislative Council does not merit particular attention here.

Australia generally is understood to be a two-party system, where the Liberal Party of Australia (conservative) and the

Australian Labor Party (social democrat) are often able to form government in their own right (Australian Labor Party 2011). Two-party hegemony is weaker at the sub-national level than the federal level, but those two parties represent the two major parties both federally and in each state and territory (Bowe 2010).

The Tasmanian House of Assembly has five electorates (McCann 2014). The number of members representing these electorates has changed over time in a highly politicised move intended to limit the likelihood of minority governments, and which will be discussed in greater detail later (Crowley 2012a). Due to the nature of the Hare Clark system, minority government was not unheard of in Tasmania in 1996. Prior to the emergence of the Tasmanian Greens, first as Green Independents in 1989 and then as a political party in 1992, there were several minority governments where independents held the balance of power (7)(Milne 2012). These independents however were generally prominent ex-Liberal or Labor members who had left the party disaffected. The major parties dealt with these balance of power independents by offering either policy concessions or positions in government in return for minority government support. Although the major parties saw minority government as an inconvenience, the independents involved in those earlier arrangements posed no real threats to the status quo of majority government (Milne 2012). It was only with the Greens' initial passing of the threshold of relevance, achieved by their gaining the balance of power in the hung parliament of 1989, that minority government truly became anathema to the major parties (Milne 2012; Pedersen 1982). The major parties thus tried to mobilise and strengthen community antipathy to minority

government by framing the Greens and their radicalism as a destabilising influence.

Tasmania had seen the birth of the world's first ever green political party, the United Tasmania Group, in 1972. It arose in response to the proposed flooding of the state's beloved Lake Pedder for hydro-electric purposes. This party did not last long, but its emergence as the first green political party in the world highlights the importance of wilderness in Tasmania. In the years that followed, Tasmania was host to another world-first: the first green-supported minority government, from 1989-1992, which I will return to in the following section. The Tasmanian Greens were officially given political party status in 1992 (Milne 2019 personal interview).

The Tasmanian economy has been dependent on extractive resource industries throughout its history, with organized resistance to this hegemony emerging in the mid-1960s. Following the resistance to hydro-industrialisation that saw the rise of the United Tasmania group in the 1970s, the most prevalent extractive resource industry in the 90s was forestry (Davis 2012). With the Labor Party as the traditional defender of workers and the Liberal Party on the side of industry, the Tasmanian Greens - as the champions of the environment - are politically isolated in their conservationist crusade. In this way, while the Greens and the Labor Party may have some policy proximity on certain social issues, the Tasmanian Liberal and Labor Parties have higher policy proximity on the environment and economic development. The major parties thus coalesce to protect industry and industry workers against the environmentalists threatening to 'lock up' lucrative areas of Tasmania's natural environment (McKim 2019 personal

interviews; Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews; Morris 2019 personal interviews; O'Halloran 2019 personal interviews; Kirkpatrick 2012). There is therefore a very influential cleavage conflict between forestry and conservation that decreases the policy proximity between the Tasmanian Greens and the major parties in related areas.

Cleavage conflict is understood here to refer to conflicts 'rooted in the social structural transformations that have been triggered by large-scale processes' (Bornschieer 2009: 1). These cleavage conflicts divide society into groups with politically competing interests (Bornschieer 2009). Tasmania's economic development trajectory, a 'large-scale process' intent on 'social structural transformations', has led to a cleavage conflict between forestry and conservation. As described above, the state's dependence on extractive resource industries is in direct conflict with conservation movements that reflect the attachment to wilderness that many have in the state (Bell and Felton 2012; Davis 2012; Kirkpatrick 2012; McCall 2012). The resulting cleavage conflict has limited the willingness of the major parties to enter Green-supported minority government in Tasmania, as will now be shown.

IV. The 1996 context

In 1996 the Liberal Party had been governing in majority for four years, one full term. This followed the 1989-1992 minority government wherein the Green Independents agreed to provide confidence and supply, allowing the passage of votes of investiture and budgets in the absence of gross malfeasance and corruption, in return for policy concessions (Crowley 2012b). This minority government agreement was called the Labor-Green Accord, and its legacy was felt after the 1996 election.

The Accord had made the Tasmanian Greens the first green party in the world to support minority government, but the government did not run full term, ending a year early in 1992 (Crowley 2012b). Although ground-breaking in many ways, the Accord did nothing to prevent the growth of existing tensions between the two parties. These tensions related to the forestry-conservation cleavage conflict and the resulting lack of policy proximity between Labor and the Greens on these issues (Herr 2012). This history of the minority government, which ended a year early, soured Labor Party representatives, members and voters against the Greens. The social context thus greatly impacted the minority government options available to the Greens in 1996 (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews).

V. The 1996 Tasmanian state election

Leading up to and following the 1996 election, the Labor Party repeatedly stated their refusal to govern in minority or with the support of the Greens. This directly reflects the impact of the social context of the Labor-Green Accord. The Labor Party produced a public letter, confirmed by all Labor candidates to the election and signed by all members of the party's parliamentary wing, promising not to govern in minority with the Greens (Herr 2012).

Although the Liberals may have wished to follow suit, as the incumbent governing party they could not (Herr 2012). Despite this and voter intention polls prior to the election indicating that minority government was highly likely, the incumbent Liberal Premier, Ray Groom, swore against governing in minority or with the Greens both ahead of, and immediately following, the 1996 election (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews; Herr 2012). These statements ignored the

reality of the institutional context but also reflected the influence of the social context. The forestry-conservation cleavage conflict meant the Liberals had low policy proximity with the Greens. Compounded by the acrimony of the Labor-Green Accord, this meant they had no interest in being seen to cooperate with them (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews; Putt 2019-2020 personal interviews; Herr 2012).

The Greens had heeded the voter intention polls signalling a likely minority government and attempted to educate the public about minority government during their election campaigns (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews; Tasmanian Greens 1996). A position statement was produced outlining three different options for minority government should that be the outcome of the election (Tasmanian Greens 1996). This was also intended to help inform Green Party voters about the options available to the elected Green Members of Parliament (MP).

Without referencing a particular party that they would support, the three options for minority government presented by the Greens were: an executive coalition with an agenda; a legislative coalition, and; an informal supply and confidence arrangement. The models outlined were identified through research but also through party room discussions, as they were aware that they 'may be pioneering new ground for the Greens' (Putt Apr. 2019 personal interview).

In 1996 the five Tasmanian electorates were each represented by seven members and elected with a vote quota of 12.5%. With 35 seats in the House of Assembly, 18 were needed for a majority (Milne 2012).

Table 1- 1996 Tasmanian election results (Parliament of Tasmania 2002c)

Party	Seats won (change from previous election)	Percentage of vote state-wide	Change in vote share from previous election
The Liberal Party	16 (-3)	41.2%	-12.9%
The Australia Labor Party	14 (+3)	40.5%	+11.6%
The Tasmanian Greens	4 (-1)	11.1%	-2.1%
Independent	1 (+1)	3.5%	
Other	0	3.7%	

The elected Greens were Christine Milne (party leader), Peg Putt (deputy), Michael Foley, and Di Hollister (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews; Putt Apr. 2019 personal interview). Although the Greens held more seats and received a higher percentage of votes in 1992 than they did in 1996, the absence of a majority following the 1996 election gave them the balance of power. Despite being an independent, they were unable to provide a majority in the hung parliament and so were not salient through minority government formation.

VI. Minority government formation

The existing cleavage conflict in Tasmania and the institutional dynamics of the 1996 election produced a minority government without a formal agreement (Strom 1990). Both the social and institutional contexts had powerful impacts on this outcome. As has briefly been mentioned, the legacy of the 1989-1992 Labor-Green Accord had a significant impact on the minority government options available following the 1996 election. The public backlash during that period fuelled the Tasmanian public's distrust of minority government. Both major parties therefore distanced themselves from the Greens, campaigned against minority government, and

committed themselves to governing solely in majority (Herr 2012).

Following the 1996 election the Greens made overtures to the Labor Party to offer their support for a Labor minority government. Labor refused to entertain entering a minority government with the Greens again, reflecting both the distrust for the Greens and dislike for minority government that had each been worsened by the experience of the Accord (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews). The Governor therefore had to compel the incumbent Liberal Party to form a government. Groom had publicly spoken against the Greens and minority government, so he was replaced as leader of the Tasmanian Liberals by Tony Rundle. Rundle was willing to rule in a minority (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews; Herr 2012). 'The Liberals, caught in a constitutional trap, were virtually forced to take up minority government, changing leaders in an attempt to keep faith with the electorate' (Kirkpatrick 2012: 214).

The Greens knew they must either support a Liberal minority government or force a second election. Having promised publicly that there would only be one election, the Greens thus recognized that they must

support a Liberal minority government (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews). Although the Greens hoped to negotiate a charter for stability and good government, as outlined in their position statement, they anticipated that any written agreement would be rejected (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews; Putt Feb. 2020 personal interview; McCall 2012). Milne reached out to Premier Rundle in order to discuss how it might work, trying to negotiate an arrangement for the minority government (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews; Putt Feb. 2020 personal interview).

'The normal assumption in balance of power is that you will have negotiated some policy outcomes' or some other guarantees, but this was not possible (Milne Apr. 2019 personal interview). The negativity that had surrounded the Labor-Green Accord taught the Liberals not to enter into such an agreement. 'The Greens had no leverage. There was no capacity to negotiate any particular outcomes or any policy positions or anything because Labor had walked away and said they had no interest in being government' (Milne Apr. 2019 personal interview). They therefore had to support the Liberal Party minority government without any guarantees or formal arrangements. The social context had made neither major party willing to enter Green-supported minority government, but the institutional context forced the Liberals to accept their support. Nevertheless, the history of the Labor-Green Accord contributed to the social context that led the Liberals to favour governing with no written, formal arrangements for support (Milne Apr. 2019 personal interview).

Nonetheless Milne undertook, without a formal agreement, for the Greens to provide supply and confidence for the

Rundle minority government in the absence of corruption or gross misconduct (Crowley 2003). This was seen by the elected Greens to be less of an agreement with the Liberals and more of an agreement with themselves. They 'felt bound to be responsible in a situation where a party actually had that number of votes and... should therefore continue the government unless they stuffed up really badly' (Putt Apr. 2019 personal interview). Milne also promised him that the Greens would never introduce legislation to parliament without first informing the Liberals so that there would be no surprises (Milne Apr. 2019 personal interview). In addition to this, an informal arrangement was established to brief the Greens on Cabinet decisions and to allow them to comment on them (Tanner 2012).

Due to the lack of options available, the Greens did not consult their voters about the minority government arrangement. Their 'supporters... would have no doubt... preferred if [they] had been able to get some agreement with policy concessions, but they understood that this was not the circumstance that [the Green MLAs] were in, that because of the history and the point that [the party had] arrived at ... [they] just didn't have that opportunity. ... [Putt] expect[ed] that there also would have been a number of Greens voters who would have been very nervous about a written agreement with the Liberal Party' because of the Liberals' politics and/or the history of the Labor-Green Accord (Putt Apr. 2020 personal interview).

VII. In Parliament

This section provides an overview of the period of parliament. It includes discussion of the crisis impetus for cooperation, how the political parties worked together generally throughout the period, and specific dynamics surrounding gay law

reform and the Regional Forest Agreement.

Cooperation from crisis

The initial impetus for cooperation between the elected parties was the tragedy of the Port Arthur massacre (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews). The massacre, which killed 35 and wounded 18, took place only three weeks after the Rundle government had been installed (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2019).

The shock and horror felt by the Tasmanian community provided the right atmosphere for cooperative politics to be championed over adversarial approaches (Herr 2012). The Greens had previously campaigned for both a more cooperative political culture and gun law reform, and this crisis enabled both. Yet the major parties were still reluctant to support gun law reform. Milne told them that unless they agreed to a tripartite expression of support for gun law reform she would go to the rapidly amassing international media and tell them that the Liberals and Labor had 'blood on their hands' (Milne Apr. 2019 personal interview). The parties assented, and a tripartite committee was established to deal with gun law reform. After successful reform at the state level the then Prime Minister, John Howard, was able to use the Tasmanian example to reform national gun laws (Herr 2012).

Despite pressure from the gun law reform lobby, the Green Party refused to blame the massacre on the inaction of the major parties. Furthermore, despite instigating the reform, the Greens chose to not assert credit for it, preferring to highlight it as a success of tripartite cooperation. This reflects the party's commitment to cooperative politics. Yet it also highlights their policy orientation, which prioritised policy success over credit for initiatives

and party distinctiveness (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews). This crisis and the collaboration it engendered then set the tone for how politics would be done in this parliament, for some time at least (Putt Feb. 2020 personal interview). Although the crisis itself is seen to have triggered more cooperative politics, this could have been avoided or less successful in a majority government, as the governing party would not have had to rely on outsiders to pass responding legislation.

Informal arrangements for inter-party cooperation

In the absence of mechanisms formalized in a written agreement, Rundle appointed a Liberal staffer, David Adams, to be the point of contact between the Liberals and the Greens (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews). Adams liaised with the Greens' chief-of-staff to keep the party abreast with the Liberals' parliamentary agenda. He also facilitated meetings with Liberal Ministers and occasionally the Premier himself (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews, Putt Apr. 2019 personal interview). These were very much 'behind-the-scenes' discussions, as the Liberals did not want to be seen publicly cooperating with the Greens (Putt Apr. 2019 personal interview).

The times when the Greens sought meetings with Rundle it was usually on issues where the two parties had major differences. When they were granted access to the Premier, which was not in every case that they requested, the Greens felt that Rundle 'was not particularly receptive' (Putt Feb. 2020 personal interview). There were times when they were able to 'thrash some things out, but there were [nevertheless] quite a few times when [they] didn't' due to seemingly immovable differences (Putt Feb. 2020 personal interview).

Regardless of these 'behind-the-scenes' discussions with the Liberals, the dynamics of minority government during this period largely saw debate returned to the floor of house. 'There was never some accepted formula' in how the Greens approached attempts to cooperate with the major parties and it 'varied on almost every given issue' (Putt Feb. 2020 personal interview). However, due to the increased need to find accommodations, adjournments were regularly used during this period. The adjournments provided opportunities for research and/or smaller-scale discussions on the issue at hand. This enabled greater cooperation and for the development of outcomes 'that more nearly reflected ... the combined views of the Tasmanian population' (Putt Feb. 2020 personal interview). This highlights how minority government, even without formal provisions in place to aid cooperation, can promote more cooperative politics simply through the division of seats. Without a majority, debate on the floor of parliament is more influential.

Gay law reform

During this period of government Tasmania was economically vulnerable. With the Greens having agreed to support the Liberal governments budgets, Rundle asked Milne what the Greens wanted most to achieve during this period of government. This was done in recognition of the Greens' commitment to support the Liberal budgets. The Greens nominated the decriminalisation of homosexuality as their primary ask. Rundle assented and agreed that, if the Greens were able to get the numbers in the Lower House, he would instruct the leader of government in the Upper House to pass the legislation (Milne Apr. 2019 personal interview). Milne and Rundle thus worked together to ensure the passage of gay law reform (Milne 2012).

Although the discussion of gay law reform occurred ahead of the 1997 budget, gay law reform was not an explicit trade for the Greens support of the Liberals' budgets. It was merely an acknowledgement that the government would have to pass items that the Greens would not approve of and was the first policy-related concession that the Liberals gave the Greens in order for the arrangement to work (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews). This further shows that in the absence of formal arrangements the governing party can acknowledge the sacrifices of support parties who pass potentially unpopular budgets. Specific pieces of legislation may therefore be offered or promised to recognize their support.

The Regional Forest Agreement

In addition to gay law reform, the Rundle minority government oversaw the development of the Regional Forest Agreement (RFA). This attempted to address the cleavage conflict of forestry versus conservation by resolving 'the debate on the future of Australian native forests by taking care of biodiversity, old-growth and wilderness preservation needs first; then by ensuring physical sustainability of any use; then by facilitating economic development in the remaining forests, within agreed legal and social constraints' (Kirkpatrick 2012: 203-204). Yet the RFA process failed to produce all of the conservation outcomes the Greens had hoped for. This reflected the policy proximity of the major parties on development promotion, and the need for the Greens to compromise (Kirkpatrick 2012).

Forest groups put pressure on the Greens to bring down the government over the RFA, insisting on the need for an election based on the forest issue. This pressure

was played out in public and added to the unity-distinctiveness dilemma (McCall 2012). Although the Greens were not satisfied with the conservation outcomes of the RFA they chose not to bring the government down. It was the Greens' belief that the Labor Party's forest policy was at the time worse than that of the Liberals, and so the Greens could not condone any move that might put Labor into power before the process was complete (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews).

Despite holding the numbers to support the Liberal minority government, the high degree of policy proximity between the two major parties meant that the Greens did not hold the balance of power for the RFA. Although this prevented the full attainment of the Greens' conservation goals, the process did produce conservation outcomes that would likely not have been possible without the RFA, and which went further than any other forest legislation had previously (Crowley 2012a; Kirkpatrick 2012). This highlights the difficulty support parties can face when policy proximity is high between the Government and the Opposition. It also reinforces the fact that balance of power is variable, and although it may be held during minority government formation it will not be held for the entirety of the minority government period.

IIX. The end of government

In July 1998 Rundle announced an early election for 29 August, saying that the 'hung parliament [had] reached its use by date' (Bell and Felton 2012: 120). The exact reasons for the demise of the minority government are debated but are generally seen to be related to Rundle's lack of control over his own government (Putt Apr. 2019 personal interview; Beckett 2012; Bell and Felton 2012). This

lack of control was most keenly evidenced in relation to two different legislative issues, namely what to do about the Hydro-Electric Commission and whether and how to reform the parliament, discussed in turn next.

What to do about the Hydro-Electric Commission

In April 1997 the Rundle minority government released the Directions Statement which outlined the government's approach to economic policy and improving state capacity. A central aspect of this plan was the proposed sale of Tasmania's Hydro-Electric Commission (HEC), the revenue from which would be used to eliminate state debt (Bell and Felton 2012). Given that the Greens were opposed to the hydroelectric industrialisation of Tasmania, the Liberal Party had assumed that they would be in favour of such a move. The reality was that the Greens opposed the sale and wanted the assets to remain in public hands (Milne 2012). The party generally was not in favour of privatization (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews). After deliberation in the party room the Greens proposed a short-term lease for the generation and distribution infrastructure of the HEC (McCall 2012). Labor was opposed to both the partial or full sale or leasing of the HEC, and the Greens proposed compromise was deemed a 'non-decision' by both the major parties and the public (McCall 2012: 171).

The HEC became the flash point around which resistance to the reforms outlined in the government's Directions Statement increased and cohered (Beckett 2012; Bell and Felton 2012). The government's inability to sell the HEC and fund its signature reforms was demonstrative of its lack of control of the minority government situation. This lack of control was a

contributing factor to the decision to call an early election (Putt Apr. 2019 personal interview, Bell and Felton 2012). The case of the HEC highlights the difficulties involved in minority governments that lack formal agreements. Certain analyses see the calling of the 1998 election as Rundle seeking to renew, or confirm, his mandate to implement the economic policy outlined in the Directions Statement of which the sale of the HEC was fundamental (Putt Apr. 2019 personal interview, Bell and Felton 2012, Beckett 2012).

Reducing the parliamentary numbers

By 1998 the goodwill and trust forged through the tragedy of the Port Arthur massacre had all but dissipated. The last nail in the coffin for the informal Liberal-Green support arrangement was the issue of parliamentary reform. This was not a new issue; the seeds of this dispute had been sown prior to the formation of the Rundle minority government (Milne 2017). Rundle and the Liberals had been in favour of reducing the numbers in parliament, as were Labor; the difference being their approach to this reform (Milne 2012).

Rundle had given Milne a promise that he would not adopt a model of parliamentary reform that would disadvantage the Greens (Milne Jun. 2019 personal interview). He initially advocated for a model that would reduce the size of parliament from 54 to 44, leaving the electoral quota for achieving a seat in the House of Assembly unchanged at 12.5% (Milne 2012). Labor on the other hand were pushing a model that would change the parliament to having only 40 members, with only 25 in the Lower House, increasing its electoral quota to 16.7% (Bennet 2010, Crowley 2003). The quota proposed by Labor was - not coincidentally - higher than the Greens' historical share of the vote (Milne Jun. 2019 personal

interviews). If Rundle had not done so the interview).

Rundle supported his model of parliamentary reform up until two Liberal members threatened to cross the floor and vote with Labor if he did not introduce the Labor model of reform to parliamentary numbers (Milne 2019-2020 personal Labor Party would have introduced it themselves, and with the defection of two Liberal members he would have lost control of his government (Putt Apr. 2019 personal interview). Any respectful engagement between the Liberals and the Greens ended when Rundle caved to this pressure (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews). Rundle not only broke his word to not introduce a model that would disadvantage the Greens, but he also gave the party no warning that he was going to do so (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews, Tanner 2012).

Parliament, then on a break, was recalled and the legislation was rushed through using various 'parliamentary tactics: a no-confidence motion in the speaker; dissenting from a ruling from the speaker; motions to suspend standing orders, and motions to alter the order paper' (Haward & Zwart 2012, p. 154, Putt Apr. 2019 personal interview). The state election of 1998 was called shortly afterwards (Putt Apr. 2019 personal interview, Beckett 2012). This affair highlights the instability that minority government without formalized supply and confidence arrangements can experience. It is also an instance wherein the governing party, and in this case therefore the minority government itself, lacked unity. Rundle dealt with this by attempting to assert their distinctiveness by betraying the Greens and calling an election.

It is of course impossible to speculate

whether a formal minority government arrangement would have prevented the parliamentary reform schism. We cannot know what a formal agreement would have included. However, if Rundle had kept his undertaking to Milne, or if it had been included in a formal agreement, the introduced reform would presumably not have included an electoral quota below the Greens' historical vote share. The HEC dilemma may have nonetheless contributed to an early election.

IX. The 1998 Tasmanian state election

By the time the election was called, media polls put public support for the Rundle government at only 27.2% (Bell and Felton 2012). The Liberals, unsurprisingly, lost the election with a 3.1% decrease in their support base and winning only 10 seats. The Labor Party won a majority of 14 seats, increasing their vote share by 4.3% (Parliament of Tasmania 2002d).

The Greens' vote held relatively steady, decreasing by only 0.9%, but the Labor model of reform did what it was designed to do, and the Greens' four seats became one (Crowley 2012a). With the new numbers in the House of Assembly, the Labor Party gained minority government.

X. Discussion

Griffith (2010: 41) notes that 'exceptions will apply, but for the most part qualified or conditional power of the kind enjoyed by minority government is ... preferable to Opposition'. This suggests that, in most cases of a hung parliament, major parties in two-party systems should find government desirable, even in minority and with support from a minor party. This case presents an exception, due to the negativity ascribed to minority government generally and the minor party in balance of power, the Tasmanian Greens.

Neither major party wanted to enter negotiations or minority government with the Greens. Interviewees commented that this is an unusual occurrence as parties in Opposition usually take any chance to enter government (McKim 2019 personal interviews; Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews; Putt Apr. 2019 personal interview; O'Connor Apr. 2019 personal interviews). This shows how negative social contexts can lead to the exception mentioned in the Griffith (2010) quote which opened this section.

The Tasmanian forestry-conservation cleavage conflict has led the Greens to be seen by the major parties as a threat to business as usual due to their lack of consensus in related policy areas (McKim 2019 personal interviews; Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews). This social context contributes to an 'electorate that is being primed not to accept minority governments, to see [them] as a problem,' and to see the Greens' radicalism as a destabilising force (O'Connor 2019 personal interviews). The major parties therefore prefer not to leave the 'safety' of Opposition for the uncertainty of minority government with the Greens. This social context removes any network-making power that a balance of power position should afford the Greens. The institutional context was the only thing that empowered them to support minority government at all. Yet, despite empowering them, the institutional context also limited their options to supporting the incumbent party.

In 1996 we saw how the social and institutional contexts drastically reduced the Greens' agency and power (Herr 2012). They had no choice of who to support because they 'had no leverage' (Milne Jun. 2019 interview). The Liberals, as incumbents compelled to form

government, were able to refuse to negotiate a formal arrangement with the Greens (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews; Putt Apr. 2019 personal interview). The absence of negotiation in 1996 was thus evidence of the influence of the local history of minority government (McKim 2019 personal interviews; Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews, Morris 2019 personal interviews; Putt Apr. 2019 personal interview). The legacy of the 1989-1992 Labor-Green Accord meant that The Liberals could not condone a written agreement with the Greens in 1996. The Liberals had seen how Labor was saddled with the failures of the Accord and were determined not to repeat the mistake of entering into a formal agreement with the Greens (Milne 2019-2020 personal interview; Putt Apr. 2019 personal interview). This case of informal minority government support would also go on to influence the model of Labor minority government supported by the Tasmanian Greens in 2010 (McKim 2019 personal interviews; Morris 2019 personal interviews).

Although the Greens were only given one model of minority to support, there remained the option to refuse to support minority government at all. In such cases, if no alternatives exist, another election must be called (Strom 1990). Given that the interviewed members expressed their commitment to providing stable governance, they could not realistically choose to force a second election (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews; Putt 2019-2020 interviews). Therefore, the institutional context, combined with the elected members' commitment to stability, precluded the Greens' agency and choice, greatly influencing their decision-making.

This therefore demonstrates the combined influence that social and institutional

contexts can have on the available options for minority government support. The Greens' agency was limited in 1996 by the Tasmanian Liberals who 'offered' only one minority government arrangement, informal supply and confidence. The institutional context removed the Greens' leverage, and the social context hobbled their options. The social context can thus limit their power and agency so much so that all they can do is support the parameters established by the incumbent party, compelled to form government by the institutional context (Herr 2012).

In the 1996-1998 Tasmanian parliament the concern with maintaining distinctiveness between the minority government parties was obvious. It was evident in the negativity surrounding the Green party and thus the arms-length approach that the Liberals took with working with them. The informal procedures that were developed to facilitate the two parties' cooperation were purposefully relegated to back rooms in order to keep their cooperation out of the public eye as much as possible. The Labor Party nevertheless constantly framed the two parties as being in bed together, to the detriment of both (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews).

Moreover, a desire to demonstrate distinctiveness was a contributing factor to the early end of that minority government. This was tied into the issues of the Hydro-Electric Commission and parliamentary reform. Although the latter was more related to a concern over Rundle's control over his own party, backing Labor's model also provided a desirable opportunity to distance the Liberals from the Greens. By calling an early election Rundle had hoped to gain a governing majority, removing his party's reliance on the Greens (Putt Apr. 2019

personal interview; Bell and Felton 2012, Herr 2012). Thus, unity between the support and governing parties was avoided and the desire for distinctiveness was a significant factor throughout the parliament, contributing to its early end.

It is also important to acknowledge that, 'while the Greens' philosophical tradition is clearly and predominantly radical, it is also true that the party's radical impulses operate alongside, and are tempered by, the forces of political expediency... The Greens show an aptitude for selectively rationing pragmatism in pursuit of 'radical' objectives' (Miragliotta 2006: 595). This political expediency and pragmatism can be seen in the Greens' view that compromise is a necessary part of politics (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews; O'Connor 2019 personal interviews; O'Halloran 2019 personal interviews).

Although the Tasmanian 1996-1998 parliament ended two years early, without the Greens the government would not have been formed in the first place. The members' commitment to stability led them to support the Liberals without a written agreement despite the risks (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews, Putt Apr. 2020 personal interview). While their objective to provide stability did not fully materialise, given the government's early end, this was due to no major fault of their own (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews, Putt Apr. 2019 personal interview, Bell and Felton 2012). The objective of stability was not overly successful in this case, but they did succeed in using the dynamics of minority government to help create policy that reflected the diverse views of the Tasmanian people, including gun and gay law reform (Putt Apr. 2019 personal interview, McCall 2012).

'If the long-term focus of Green parties is upon government participation, then periods of supporting government offer the opportunity for building trust between parties and learning the lessons of governing' (Crowley and Moore 2019: 17). Although the next Green-supported minority government did not occur in Tasmania until 2010, the model eventually adopted was that of an executive coalition, where two Green members were made members of the Labor Cabinet. The 1996-1998 experience of minority government can therefore be seen as a 'stepping stone' for the Greens, as their next foray into minority government resulted in cabinet positions (Crowley and Moore 2019: 17). This shows that, despite struggles regarding the unity-distinctiveness dilemma, credit and compromise during minority government, the choice to support does provide benefits and return the Greens' non-policy objectives. Although the Greens' vote declined, the interviewed elected members generally felt that they spent their electoral capital well (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews; Putt Apr. 2019 personal interview).

XI. Conclusion

Despite holding the balance of power in the 1996 hung parliament, the specific context of cleavage conflict and the history of minority government meant that the Greens had no strategic advantage (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews; Putt Apr. 2019 personal interview; Herr 2012). This forced them to provide supply and confidence with no formal arrangements and without any concessions for their support (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews; Herr 2012). Such a model of minority government is quite unstable, and this was the case here (Strom 1990; Griffith 2010). Although the dynamics of minority government did

result in more representative outcomes, developed from an increase in debate on the floor of parliament, the major parties did attempt to keep the Greens at arms-length when possible (Putt Apr. 2019 personal interview; Crowley 2012a; Herr 2012). The early end to the government reflected issues of internal Liberal Party unity and a desire to reassert control by distinguishing and distancing the party from the Greens (Putt Apr. 2019 personal interview; Beckett 2012; Bell and Fenton 2012).

The 1998 election saw a 0.9% decrease in the Greens' vote (Parliament of Tasmania 2002c, 2002d). Despite this, and both the low government stability and the low duration of the informal arrangements evidenced by the government's early end, Milne and Putt believe that their support of the Rundle government was worth it (Milne 2019-2020 personal interviews; Putt Apr. 2019 personal interview). A culture of adversarial politics and the lack of a formal agreement, in addition to the major parties' disdain for the Greens and minority government, created an atmosphere that was bound to be testing. It was, however, a relatively productive period of government despite its early end. Rundle himself admitted this fact (Crawford 2012; Herr 2012). Liberal ministers of that government have since (privately) spoken highly of that period, saying it was real democracy at work. They needed to defend their positions on the floor, making wins more satisfying and representative of the Tasmanian populace (Putt Apr. 2019 personal interview; Milne 2012).

This case shows the importance of both institutional and social contexts in influencing the agency the Greens have in the formation of minority governments. It also highlights how the dynamics of policy

proximity can influence their power in parliament. This case also clearly shows that, even without a written agreement, the Greens were committed to providing stable governance and cooperative politics. Their objectives in this regard did not change throughout the parliament, but in certain cases it could be said that these objectives overshadowed other, more conservationist or policy-based objectives. Compromise in these conservation-related areas also contributed to their experience of the unity-distinctiveness dilemma, as people in the movement felt they had given too much up. Finally, and undoubtedly, this case underlines how the lack of a formal written agreement does not preclude the ability for cooperation between the support and governing parties, even if such arrangements do lack mutual mechanisms to ensure stability.

Notes

- (1) 8 April, 5 June, 2019; 1 April, 2020.
- (2) 9 April, 2019; 14 February, 2020.
- (3) 10 April, 6 June, 2019.
- (4) 4 April, 7 May, 2019.
- (5) 8 and 12 April, 2019.
- (6) 4 April, 1 May, 2019.
- (7) 1969 (Liberal minority government with ex-Liberal Party member support), 1959 and 1934 (Labor minority government with ex-Labor member support) (Parliament of Tasmania 2001, 2002a, 2002b). Minority governments led by now defunct parties also occurred in 1928, 1922 and 1916 (Parliament of Tasmania 2003a, 2003b and 2003c).

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Biography

Arabella is an Australian citizen with a strong interest in politics and sustainability. She has just graduated with distinction from her Masters of Science in International Development Studies at Wageningen University and Research in the Netherlands. Before this, she graduated from the University of Exeter with a Bachelor of Liberal Arts in International Relations and Environmental Politics. She has had experience interning with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in addition to the United Nations Environment Programme. Despite having not lived in Australia for 12 years now, Arabella has maintained a connection with her country and its politics. The case presented in this Journal represents one of four which were the basis of her MSc thesis on the Australian Greens in sub-national minority-governments.