

Parliamentary Experiences of the Tasmanian Greens: The Politics of the Periphery¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper reflects upon the green political trajectory in Tasmania from the founding in 1972 of the world's first green² party, the United Tasmania Group, to the recent 'electoral reform' that in effect disenfranchised most of the Tasmanian parliamentary greens (Crowley, 2000). It argues that green politics, whilst fundamentally transforming the island state of Tasmania in part through its nature conservation successes, has remained a politics at the periphery that is resisted by both the major parties. This peripheralisation is not entirely owed to the green's longstanding pursuit of wilderness preservation, however, but also to their preoccupation both with progressive politics and democratic accountability that has led them into state parliament where they have twice achieved the balance of power (Crowley, 1996; 1999b). This paper recounts familiar terrain with its description of Tasmania as a conservative, economically marginal island state that has pursued a development formula based upon resource exploitation and hydroindustrialisation that went unchallenged until the rise of the greens. It shows how Tasmania's green politics, perhaps unlike green politics in more vital, less marginal contexts, has been a politics of contrast and change, ecocentric to its core, but strategically concerned with broader social reformism. By considering the failure of both green minority governments (Labor-Green 1989-91; and Liberal-Green 1996-8), it further reinforces how much the major parties have resisted green efforts both to share the state political stage and to move more than rhetorically away from resource based developmentalism³.

INTRODUCTION

Green politics was founded in Tasmania many years before the word 'green' had found its way into the global political lexicon. It was founded in 1972 with the formation of the world's first green party, the United Tasmania Group. The UTG comprised a group of conservationists who had tried in vain to save Lake Pedder from hydro-inundation by the state Labor Government. They had appealed to both sides of politics to intervene, change their minds, and preserve an endangered wilderness (Walker, 1987; Crowley, 1999). At the time the UTG was founded, the long reigning Labor Government had been cast from office partly over its handling of the Pedder dispute, and a coalition Liberal Government held power precariously supported by one independent⁴. Conservationists had a reasonable hope of snatching the balance of power by exploiting the state's Hare-Clark electoral system of proportional representation, one of the world's most democratically fair (Johnson, 1972)⁵. The fact that they were only narrowly unsuccessful in gaining a seat, that Lake Pedder was subsequently flooded, and that the rest of the South West wilderness seemed equally threatened, fuelled their activism into the 1980s. The formula for the founding of this very first, very early, green party is thus nature conservationists encountering bi-partisan political resistance to their efforts to save a threatened wilderness, and then exploiting an electoral system that offered a reasonable chance of achieving their own representation.

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Critical to an explanation of this 'very first, very early, green party' is of course the unique Tasmanian environment. This is not to say that social reformism itself may not have generated a third political party in Tasmania in the early 1970s. However given the historical failure of third parties in the state, with the exception of the Tasmanian Greens⁶, this seems unlikely. Put simply, if there had been no wilderness under threat at the time and subsequently, there would have been no green politics. As we shall see, this does not suggest that green politics is solely concerned with wilderness, as its critics generally imply, but that wilderness preservation in Tasmania was its initial political trajectory. Nearly one quarter of the island of Tasmania is listed as world heritage predominantly for its natural value (Environment Australia, 1999). As Hay and Haward (1988) have argued, you cannot define the green phenomenon beyond the European context without acknowledging the centrality of the desire of its activists to preserve wilderness. Whilst these authors may neglect the broader social agenda of green politics in Australia, they are still right to argue that such politics at its essence turns upon wilderness campaigning, and that, in Tasmania, this has limited its electoral appeal. This is after all a politics of advanced radicalism, they claim, that owes the ethical basis of its actions to ecocentrism, or 'the notion that moral standing is not an exclusive human quality' (p. 434), and is clearly beyond the left and right⁷.

Whilst there may be dispute about whether, or to what extent, ecocentrism does, or does not, inform green politics in Australia, the Tasmanian experience of the last several decades is certainly of a green politics that is resistant to the left and right, indeed as resistant as the left and right is to green politics. In theoretical terms, if one can draw this bow, Tasmanian green politics has proved as resistant to the political left and right as ecocentrism has proved to the three ideological traditions, conservatism, liberalism or socialism, within which Hay (1990) argues that ecocentrism simply cannot be justified. Others such as Dobson (2000) and Eckersley (1992) echo this 'ecocentrism as ideologically unique' argument, agreeing that ecocentrism is an ideological contender in its own right, in fact one that is 'founded upon a radically different prime value that sets it apart from the other "isms"' (Hay, 1990, p. 54). As we shall see, a defining feature of green politics in Tasmania is such ideological distinctiveness. A further distinguishing trait of ecologism is the inevitable tension between light green reformism which aims to green the 'system' and deep green radicalism which aims to project the ecocentric message undistilled with all its harsh criticisms and its utopian visions (Dobson, 2000, p. 202). Just such tension has beset green politics in Tasmania (Flanagan, 1989; McCall, 1993), stretched as it is in kaleidoscope fashion between the very lightest, most pragmatic greens to the very darkest, and most principled.

That said, this is not formulaic tension, with any obvious conflation between direct action and ecocentrism on the one hand, or parliamentary participation and green reformism on the other. There is simply a routine dilemma, such as Evernden (1984) has long recognised, between the need to reform the system over the long term, and the urgent need to act, to rescue the remnants of non-human nature. As we shall see, members of the UTG did eventually opt out of parliamentary politics, before founding the Tasmanian Wilderness Society and embarking upon Australia's most successful wilderness preservation campaigns of all time, during which Dr Bob Brown at least returned to claim a seat in state parliament. However, there is nothing atypical in terms of Tasmanian green politics about say Dr Brown's blunt dedication to direct action *and* to working within the system; indeed Tasmanian greens are very often engaged in both activities. There are other managed tensions as well that characterise green politics in Tasmania such as its disdain for the old style politics of adversarialism by greens who themselves have become masters of issue based political tactics, playing old style politics that is in consummate fashion. And even though green politics in the state is the only politics with any ideological and intellectual basis many greens would still regard 'regard theory-building as an attention-diverting luxury', a charge Hay and Haward (1988, p. 436) level at Australian environmentalists of the 1960s and 1970s.

Whatever its own character, modus operandi and inner tensions, the crucial significance of green politics in Tasmania has been its challenge to major party politics (Hay, 1993) and its unwelcome and persistent meddling in public affairs.⁸ In Eckersley's (1996) sense, green politics in Tasmania has dedicated itself to confronting the traditional partners to the industrial project in a manner that is resistant to corporatist bargaining and routine politics, and has found itself doing battle equally with both major parties as a consequence. This paper finds that not only is this green politics ideologically challenging, but that it casts the major parties in a bi-partisan light as the old parties of industrialism just as ecopolitical theorists would expect. Most crucially, this green politics has been threatening enough for the major parties to attempt to reform it out of parliament altogether by reducing parliamentary numbers and raising the electoral quota ostensibly for efficiency reasons but with an agenda that was clearly all about getting the greens (Crowley, 1999b). Tasmania's political conservatism has thus been responsible for the rise of the greens, for the persistence of green politics, for foiling green attempts at partnering political power, and in the end for the peripheralisation of green politics within state parliament. However, on many issues of state significance, the green periphery remains centre stage, where the Tasmanian Greens are again the only effective opposition on issues such as forestry plantation, wood chipping and genetically modified food concerns. From this periphery the centre remains under fire (Pybus and Flanagan, 1990).

POLITICS AT THE PERIPHERY: THE RISE OF THE GREENS

Part of the resistance to green politics is the ideology that it injects into Tasmanian politics, where region and personality have long inspired a 'politics of brokerage' that had previously completely eclipsed doctrinal cleavages, leaving little policy difference between the major parties (Sharman, 1977, p. 22; Herr, 1984). Rather than being intellectually or ideologically inspired, politics in Tasmania has traditionally been about interests; Tasmanians being credited with no set views on any particular issue (Townesley, 1976, p. 41; Chapman *et al* 1986, p. 117). In the absence of ideology, a preoccupation with the development and survival of its peripheral island economy had always driven Tasmanian politics, more so than any defining political philosophies or idealism (Hay, 1987; Flanagan, 1989, p. 37). Indeed, Hay argues that it was Labor's development policy of hydro-industrialisation that served as a bi-partisan article of faith for several generations ensuring Labor's hegemonic hold on political power for almost three decades⁹ (Hay, 1987, p.4). It was the advent of political environmentalism in Tasmania that questioned this faith, and in doing so prised loose Labor's grip upon political power that had long been consolidated by the support of unions, big business, the state bureaucracy, and even Labor's political opponents, for its hydro-strategy (Lowe, 1984; Thompson, 1981). Since Labor had always been the dominant force in state politics, Labor had the most to lose by the rise of green politics, whilst the Liberals stood to directly and routinely benefit from Labor's implosion and tactical disarray.

It should be mentioned that Labor has never seriously attempted its own ecological reinvention in coalition with the greens or otherwise, indeed that this has been broadly resisted by party conservatives, despite Labor's long experience in striking accommodationist deals with independents in order to govern. It is little remembered that whilst Labor had long dominated state politics before the rise of the greens, the election of independents had been relatively commonplace, with some even holding the balance of power (Sharman, Smith and Moon, 1991, pp. 419-20)¹⁰. Independents held the balance of power after the 1934 election, enabling Labor under Albert Ogilvie to begin its long reign in government; they kept Labor under Robert Cosgrove in power after the 1948 election; and supported Labor under Eric Reece in power after the 1959 election (Townesley, 1988). The notion that Labor dominated because it held office from 1934 to 1982 (with the exception of 1969-72) is only partially true, its dominance in terms of votes, seats and control of government (Sharman, Smith and Moon, 1991, p. 416), and its rhetorical success with hydro-development, notwithstanding. Labor needed independents to break into, and twice to hold onto, power throughout its history of dominance. It was only between 1937 and 1950 that Labor was ever dominant in terms of seats; whilst its dominance between 1972 and 1982 was marred by its one seat majority between 1976 and 1979. In fact the non-

Labor block was just one seat behind Labor in 1934; whilst the Liberal party was one seat behind in the periods 1950-55, 1959-64 and 1976-79, and held equal seats on a lesser percentage of votes between 1956-59 (Crowley, 1999b, see Table 1, p. 186).

That Labor had to cobble together arrangements in order to govern was thanks to Tasmania's Hare-Clark electoral system of proportional representation, which until recently saw the election of seven candidates to five multi-member electorates in the Lower House of Assembly (Mackerras, 1995). Had it not been for their ecocentrist, wilderness preservation demands and assault upon state development agendas and bureaucratic secrecy, then it is likely that Labor at least could have accommodated the greens. But Tasmanian independents had never before come with ideological baggage and macro-political demands. Minor parties had previously tried to break into power, but they did not fair as well as the non-aligned issue based independents given the lack of space between Tasmania's 'two moderate and conservative parties' (Townesley, 1976, p. 62), and because promotional representation best serves localised interests (Sharman, 1977). Enter the greens. Not only is the hydro-hegemony of the Labor party threatened and ideological stakes injected into political contestation, but the slender character of Labor's political dominance is revealed as Labor is cast from office in 1969, albeit briefly, and largely over the Lake Pedder dispute. This was Labor's first loss since 1934. It showed that the formula of iconic leaders being able to strike vital partnerships by indulging the agendas of independents in order to govern was altogether a different proposition when it came to the 'new' politics of conservation.

Before the coming of the Greens, Tasmanian politics was thus interest based, accommodationist and bi-partisan rather than majoritarian, with as much rivalry between candidates of the same party vying for their place in a multi-member electorate as between the major parties (Sharman, 1977; Herr, 1984; Mackerras, 1995). On the other hand, the United Tasmania Group is invariably described as ideologically driven, although in practical terms, in the lead up to the 1972 state election it was simply trying to grab the balance of power from the precarious hold of independent Kevin Lyons (Walker, 1987, p. 305). However the UTG was always more than a pragmatic party in pursuit of political influence. For a start the conservationist agenda was atypical Tasmanian politics, for breaking the bi-partisan consensus on state development, for challenging the traditional partners to hydroindustrialisation, and for refusing to compromise its demands. However the UTG has further perhaps even deeper significance for its efforts in prising democratic accountability into development politics. Being aware of the advantages of the state's Hare-Clark system, the UTG aimed for the balance of power as a remedy of last resort once the major parties declared the imminent flooding of Lake Pedder a 'non-issue' in the lead up to the 1972 election (Johnson, 1972). Quite extraordinarily, it was not the major parties but a public authority, the Hydro Electric Commission, that spared no effort, nor public monies, nor local scare campaigning on power prices, in its ultimately successful attempt to contain the conservationists (Bates, 1983).

At the 1972 election there was a strong swing to Labor, away from the short-lived Liberal minority Government, and away from non-aligned independents, whilst the UTG gained 3.9% of the state vote, and just narrowly missed out on claiming a seat in parliament. The UTG was no match for the combined front of the Labor Party, the Liberal Party, an unresponsive media and the HEC's advertising efforts (Walker, 1987, p. 306). As it happens, Labor regained power by a comfortable seven seat majority that would have been untroubled by the UTG gaining one, or even several seats. Labor probably rightly interpreted that as a vote against conservation politics and for Lake Pedder's flooding, and resisted federal intervention which threatened in the form of a moratorium on the flooding passed by the federal Labor Caucus. It is a sad, little known fact that Labor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam did nothing to save Lake Pedder despite Caucus being deeply moved by a slide show from the renowned wilderness photographer Olegas Truchanas (Cass, 1981). In the end, the early conservationists proved but fledgling political activists, as the loss of Lake Pedder attests; but ironically the future of green politics in Tasmania was assured because it needed their anger and indignation to

inspire future successes. Conservationists had also learned that a campaign based solely upon the intrinsic, aesthetic and even recreational value of a threatened wilderness was not enough if it threatened state development, not even with the national community behind it (Crowley, 1999).

In the aftermath of Lake Pedder's loss, the UTG declared its pursuit of 'a new ethic', in effect a new, value based, transformative politics; not only in terms of conservation politics, but also in terms of revisioning technology, work, society, institutional design and, most crucially, state development. Despite the founding in 1976 of the Tasmanian Wilderness Society and the shift in the 1980s to ecocentrist campaigning efforts to protect threatened wilderness, (that succeeded with the declaration and later extension of the South-West as world heritage), the UTG's new ethic has since become a touchstone agenda for the Tasmanian Greens into the 1990s and beyond. A decade before most green parties were even thought of, this ethic spelt out the need for innovative, participatory institutional design, for a shift from a society blinkered by rationality to one that responds to values, and for communities that are just, well informed, free and fairly represented (UTG, 1990). Meanwhile the idealistic conservationists of the 1970s were to harden into the political environmentalists of the 1980s, who willingly played a skilled, traditional politics in an effort to avert further ecological tragedies. The efforts of these eco-realists, and the broadening of their political campaigning beyond wilderness issues, ensured their steady entry into the House of Assembly as Green Independents throughout the 1980s, and culminated in the realisation of the UTG's dream of achieving the balance of power by supporting the minority Labor Government in 1989 (Crowley, 1996; Haward & Smith, 1990).

Meanwhile the early electoral efforts of conservationists were to prove frustrating, with the UTG unsuccessfully contesting, on average, an election each six months between 1972-79. By the mid-1970s, conservationists were facing Everden's ecological dilemma of whether to continue with their attempts to break into political power, or to shift their focus. Walker (1987, p. 310) explains that whilst the effort of contesting elections was draining, physically, financially and emotionally, pressure group activity was relatively more appealing as less demanding and offering the possible realisation of more immediate goals. About this time, the Tasmanian Wilderness Society was founded by UTG members, South-West Tasmania Action Committee members and various other smaller groups, with the plan of presenting a 'conservative up-market facade' in pursuit of SWTAC's biocentrist goals (Walker, 1987, p. 309). Walker argues that, at this stage, the core of the UTG membership then essentially opted for direct action, playing Gouldner's (1976, p. 24; p. 249) 'politics of the unsocialised outsider', that is, with an ideological basis to their activism that had its own unique power. Campaigning to save the threatened Franklin River from hydro-damming began in 1978, and was lent a critical edge by the UTG experience, but also by the previous ten years of conservationist attempts to have South-West Tasmania protected (Gee and Fenton, 1978). The loss of Lake Pedder did indeed serve as a forerunner to success in saving the Franklin in 1983, and was an inspiration for the subsequent declaration of the South-West as world heritage.

It is little appreciated, however, how greatly resented the saving of the Franklin was to the average Tasmanian, how much the major parties resisted interference in state development, and how seriously conservation threatened the politico-administrative development clique. Consequently it is easy to misread the 1980s solely as the years of Tasmania's greening because of the spectacular conservation and green political successes of that time, without recognising what Hay (1987, p. 6; 1993, p. 69) describes as the anti-green backlash. Add to this the political realignment forced by the Greens entry into state politics, and the motive for the eventual attempt to wipe them out is clearer. As Tasmania's natural ruling party, Labor was the hardest hit by the state's political greening, being cast from majority government for seventeen years after the Franklin dispute. Labor then watched from the electoral sidelines as Liberal Premier Robin Gray readily assumed Labor's mantle of 'state development at any environmental cost' and the Greens shaped up as his key adversaries (Crowley, 1989). The pragmatic electorate, unions and business were easily wooed by Gray's bold developmentalism, whilst Labor struggled to position itself against what was essentially its own agenda

(Sharman, Smith and Moon, 1991, p. 412). Throughout the 1980s, power slipped further from Labor's grasp as Gray modelled himself on Labor's brash, iconic leaders of the past. The broadening of the green agenda to include urban environment, agricultural, policy process and industrial development agendas, all with a clean green face, further sidelined Labor (Crowley, 1996).

The rise of the Greens, their entry into parliament, and their capacity to twice gain the balance of power is owed to the inspiration of the Tasmanian environment, to the fairness of the Hare-Clark electoral system, and to the bipartisan politics of ecological exclusion. Political power in Tasmania has always been synonymous with developmentalism, largely to the benefit of the Labor party, but supported across the board before the advent of the greens. Green politics thus not only disturbed the state's bi-partisan developmentalist tradition, but also its conservative and, according to Sharman and Moon (1991), largely consensual politics. Furthermore, because of the secretive, unaccountable manner in which Lake Pedder was lost¹¹, greens have always been as concerned with democratic accountability as with ecological protection and for this at times have broadened their electoral base. These twin pursuits of 'protection plus accountability' persist today, notably in campaigns against wood chipping, and for open, accountable forest administration to the extent at least that hydro-affairs are now more transparent (Crowley, 2000b, p. 64). But whilst the ecocentric pulse undeniably drives green politics in Tasmania, its parliamentary platforms have always had a breadth of vision and critique that has largely escaped both its political critics and the conservative press. Had the electoral greening of the state relied solely upon the wilderness vote, which Dr Bob Brown so effectively marshals, it is unlikely that Greens would ever have gained the balance of power.¹²

CENTRE STAGE AT LAST: GREENS IN GOVERNMENT (1989-91; 1996-8)

There are several observations that could be made about the manner in which the Greens reached the centre stage of Tasmanian politics when the Green Independents eventually gained the balance of power in 1989. Firstly, it is quite certainly the case, as Hay (1993) argues, that the Greens were a destabilising force. The Greens brought ideological challenge, arguments for change and a politics of protest against environmental harm that little suited established politics. Secondly, the reaction of the established political parties was to exclude rather than embrace this challenge and so ironically to fuel it. This had already become apparent with Labor's largely negative reaction to the campaigns to save Lake Pedder and the Franklin River, and with the Liberal Government's brash anti-environmental developmentalism of the 1980s. Thirdly, the Greens caused a realignment of what had apparently been a stable, consensus based, accommodationist politics. Given that this realignment saw the end of Labor's domination of state politics, Labor had the conservationists to blame for its fall from political grace. And finally, as Flanagan observes, the Greens achieved the balance of power with their own inner tensions unresolved. "In part" he explains, "such tensions reflect a debate concerning strategy; about the merits of parliamentary action as opposed to direct action of a type popularly associated with the Greens" (Flanagan, 1989, p. 37). Indeed it was both necessary for the Greens to enter parliament to elevate green politics onto the public agenda, and impossible once they arrived in parliament for their more ecocentrist demands to be realised (McCall, 1993; Warden, 1993).

Briefly, before considering the advent of green minority power, it is worth reviewing how the Greens came to partner government. Over the 1980s, green electoral support in Tasmania grew from the 5.4% that returned Australian Democrat Norm Sanders to state parliament in 1982, to the record high 17.1% that returned five Green Independents in 1989 to gain the balance of power. At the height of the Franklin dispute, Dr Bob Brown replaced Dr Norm Sanders on a recount of his votes after Sanders stood down in disgust at the bipartisan political support for hydroindustrialisation. Sanders' departure left the Australian Democrats a spent force in Tasmanian state politics, despite his subsequent success as an Australian Senator. Dr Brown then commandeered the green vote which strengthened and diversified at the 1986 elections thanks to Green Independent Dr Gerry Bates who was an advocate representing residents opposed to the Electrona silicon smelter. In 1989, Brown and

Bates were joined in parliament by anti-Wesley Vale pulp mill campaigners and Green Independents Christine Milne, Di Hollister and Lance Armstrong whose electoral prominence was achieved by leading a state-wide protest. The latter four Greens attracted not only the wilderness vote, but a constituency concerned with quality of life, clean-green industrial issues, and with appropriate consultative and democratic mechanisms for the approval of new industrial ventures (Crowley, 1996). Whilst Labor had equivocated about its position on the environmental controversies of the 1980s, and was unable to move beyond its hydro-industrial past, the Greens benefited electorally from the clarity of their alternative vision for clean, green, local industry.

Suffice to say, then, that the Greens reached the centre stage of Tasmanian parliamentary politics in 1989 at the electoral expense of the Labor party (Crowley, 2000), indeed that these were the circumstances in which the Labor-Green Parliamentary Accord was struck. Furthermore whilst the Greens were flush from the electoral success of five of their Independent members, and from their thwarting of the Wesley Vale pulp mill, Labor was in political disarray having hit yet another unprecedented electoral low. This was hardly auspicious for harmonious Labor-environmental relations, nor for the longevity of the Accord. Hay (1998) argues that Labor saw the signing of the Accord, and the significant conservation concessions that it formally gave to the Greens¹³ (Larmour, 1990, Appendix 1, pp. 57-65), as its final dealings with them before settling down to govern alone. Perhaps given the magnitude of their initial nature conservation achievements, the Greens took some time to realise this. They had ambitions of partnering a transformative shift to progressive government; of pursuing green, social justice and state development reforms; and of seeing power return from the executive to the floor of parliament. Not only was the political potential of the Greens thwarted before it began, then, but Labor's own policy agenda was subsequently to fall prey to Treasury influence. The result was scorched earth budgetary policy that the Accord bound the Greens into supporting, and that saw massive demonstrations and disaffection from even Labor's own dwindling union heartland (Fisher, 1992; Hay, 1998).

In fact, in its short period in minority government, and from its lowest ever electoral support base, Labor achieved a widespread alienation of a broad range of key constituents that guaranteed its further drubbing at the post Accord polls. These included those traditionalists who had felt betrayed by Labor forging an alliance with 'greenies'; those environmentalists who realised that Labor had spurned the spirit of the Accord before the ink had dried upon it; those public sector employees, including many hard core unionists, who were angered over the loss of their jobs; and all those voters who felt betrayed by the government's retreat from its policy promises given in the lead up to the 1989 election (Crowley, forthcoming). After only thirty months, the Greens themselves withdrew their support for the minority government having been out manoeuvred by their Accord partners for much of this time. The initial break in the relationship came in October 1990 when Labor raised the woodchip export quota above the level of 2.889 million tonnes per year, thus breaching a key Accord agreement. Even so, the Greens only moved no-confidence in the government towards the end of 1991; and again over its forest policy (Haward & Larmour, 1993). Indeed with Labor planning resource security legislation for the forest industry that was abhorred by the Greens and more so by their supporters, there was nowhere left for the Labor Government to go at the 1992 election, as Pybus rightly predicted, but down (Crowley, 2000; Pybus, 1991).

This short-lived experience of the minority government centre stage hurt both Accord partners in 1992, more so Labor however, as its support bottomed out at 28.9%, and it captured a total of only 11 seats, its worst result in over sixty years. Whilst the Tasmanian Greens lost significant support in percentage terms, they managed to retain their five crucial seats statewide partly by packaging their 'clean-green' vision into a Tasmanian 'business and industry' strategy. This won them the respect of small business, and for the first time saw Greens returned to state parliament in the absence of any major environmental dispute (Crowley, 1996). Immediately prior to the 1992 election, the Liberal party had dumped its contentious leader Robin Gray after his implication in a bribery affair, and under

its new leader Ray Groom, picked back up the two seats it had lost in the wake of the Wesley Vale dispute. Whilst the Tasmanian Greens had campaigned strongly in 1992 on their visions for the state, the major parties had predicably campaigned on the need for political stability, certainty and for the restoration of public faith in politics and the political process beyond minority government (Fischer, 1992). Ray Groom went on to form what proved to be a lacklustre, increasingly unpopular majority government, that became infamous for delivering politicians a 40% pay rise without delivering the promised trade-off of a cut in parliamentary numbers. This led to the public baying for 'political blood' that would eventually claim the Greens.

The Groom Liberal Government ran its full four year term, calling an election in 1996. Without any major environmental issues to ignite their campaign, the Green focus was again not only upon wilderness preservation and environmental deterioration, but upon quality of life, social equity and Tasmania's economic profile. Given that the Government was so clearly to be punished by the electorate, largely over its 40% pay-rise, and that Labor was so far from power in terms of numbers, the 1996 campaign was dominated by the prospect of a return to minority government. The major parties played a politics of distancing themselves from the Greens, Labor even ruling out any deals in writing, whilst the Greens pledged to support the party with the highest vote (Lester, 1996). Labor ran a simple campaign that relied upon the electorate's collective amnesia about Labor's fiscal stringency when in minority government itself; about its own vote in support of the 40% pay rise; and about its previous shady promises of no deals with the Greens. The Liberals were less equivocal about no minority deals, being already comfortable in government, and ran a relatively lacklustre campaign only just spurred on by the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the media's open appeals to 'shut out the Greens' (*The Australian*, Editorial, 15 March 1996, p. 12). The results saw no clear electoral winner, as widely predicted, with the Government losing three seats, the Greens losing one, and Labor picking up three (Crowley, 1996).

After the 1996 election, neither major party had the numbers to govern, and although the Greens had lost one of their five seats, and barely retained another, their remaining four seats again delivered them the balance of power, as had been expected. Labor was in no position to offer to enter into another Accord with the Greens. It had campaigned hard on its "No Deals with the Greens" slogan and had benefited electorally from both this and the public's dissatisfaction with the Groom Government; its 40% pay rise in particular. Labor was only too happy to see a Liberal-Green partnership struck, knowing that it would be the sole beneficiary in the wake of its inevitable demise, and even guaranteed to keep the Liberals in power until their first budget was handed down. Despite the strongest misgivings of their business constituency, the Liberals eased themselves into an alliance, rather than a formal Accord, with the Greens, and so formed a truly minority government from the very first (Madill, 1997). As Herr (forthcoming) points out, not only had the Liberals had already been comfortably in government at the time, they may also have been unable to refuse to govern on constitutional grounds if asked by the Governor. Most crucially, the change in leadership of both parties to Tony Rundle and Christine Milne respectively considerably eased negotiations; Rundle proving more accommodationist than Groom, and Milne espousing consultative politics that departed significantly from Bob Brown's hard nosed adversarialism (Crowley, 1996).

Whilst the rank and file of neither the Liberals nor the Greens were particularly enamoured of their partnership, and the business community was almost entirely against it, the Liberal-Green alliance nevertheless pursued an impressive reform agenda. Indeed although self evidently not natural allies of the Greens, the Liberals did not have the same historical, electoral nor personal obstacles to working with them as did Labor, the Liberal Gray Government's developmentalism of the 1980s notwithstanding (Crowley, forthcoming). The Rundle-Milne alliance went on to achieve gun law reform, gay law reform, an apology to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community's stolen children by the Tasmanian Parliament, and the disaggregation of the monolithic Hydro-Electric Commission (Milne, forthcoming). The Greens nevertheless struggled to make the ecological difference that their

supporters expected, managing only to achieve a rhetorical dedication to 'clean, green and clever' principles in Rundle's New Directions state development agenda. Meanwhile the Labor Party became the agent of parliamentary destabilisation, a charge more commonly levelled at the Greens, as it circled ever closer in upon the issue of parliamentary reform with an agenda of minimising the influence of the Greens. There was still a strong public expectation that parliamentary numbers remained to be cut to fund the Groom Government's 40% pay rise which Labor worked to its own eventual advantage.

The Rundle minority Government did pursue parliamentary reform, with the Premier advocating a democratic reduction from 54 to 44 total members that would keep the Hare-Clark electoral system intact in the Lower House. This proposal was no threat to the Greens. Labor on the other hand advocated a reduction from 54 to 40 members, with the 'five x seven' member electorates in the Lower House to be cut to 'five x five' member electorates. This proposal would return Labor to majority government and decimate the Greens¹⁴. It is beyond the scope of this paper to recount how Labor achieved its own model, other than to note that several attempts failed to achieve democratic reform (Tasmanian Parliamentary Library, 1998). Rundle's model was rejected by the Legislative Council, amended to Labor's model and returned to the Lower House causing a deadlock that was only later resolved by rebel Liberals and the business community backing Labor. By this stage, Rundle's Government was being held to ransom by Labor over its budget proposal to sell the State's disaggregated Hydro-Electric Commission to retire debt (Crowley, 1999b)¹⁵. Rundle's 'out' was to declare himself unable to govern and call an early election after adopting Labor's model, which had a swift passage through the Lower House and the Legislative Council without reference to the Tasmanian electorate. The democratic scope of parliament has thus been reduced, independent representation has been virtually wiped out, effective oversight of the Executive has diminished, and the powers of the Legislative Council remain intact (Crowley, 2000).

CONCLUSIONS: THE ECOPOLITICAL LIMITS?

Most theorists would agree that the political expression of ecologism is, by way of its ecocentrism, not easily accommodated by the political left or right, nor, as Tasmania shows, within the political system (Hay, 1998). In Tasmania we find green politics strongly voiced, not only by way of its ecocentrism, but as a counter measure to the conservatism of the major parties, and because of the encouragement of the Hare-Clark system. At the 1998 election, the quota for the election of a single candidate rose from 12.5% as it had been with seven member electorates, to 16.7% as it became under the newly reformed electoral system of five member electorates. Although the Tasmanian Green vote held steady at its 1996 levels of about 11%, the Greens lost three of their four seats and with them the balance of power in the Lower House (Crowley, 2000). From a position only two years earlier where there appeared no limit to the potential of green parliamentary politics in Tasmania, there now appears to be no lengths to which the major parties and the conservative establishment won't go to limit green power. This peripheralisation is not entirely owed to the Green's ecocentrism, but to their radical realignment of state politics that thrust Labor into the political wilderness, disrupted the consensualism on state development, and pressed for unheard of transparency and accountability in both state political and administrative affairs.

The recent bi-partisan 'electoral reform' that has all but wiped out the Green presence in the Lower House of Assembly clearly expresses the enduring sentiment that green politics is not seen as legitimate by the major parties and their constituencies. Both parties have now experienced minority partnerships with the Greens, the Labor party essentially using the experience to try to reintegrate its lost conservation vote, and the Liberals persisting with their unholy alliance against all possible odds. Neither partnership allowed the Greens to legitimately share the political centre stage by assuming ministerial responsibilities, but used them as a pragmatic device for obtaining government, in Labor's case, at least initially, in return for significant concessions. In neither minority arrangement were the Greens able to achieve their core ecocentrist demands, forestry reform for instance that was sought both

to alleviate and make more accountable the pressures on remnant old growth forests. There were nevertheless, better, more consultative relations, a higher degree of personal trust, and greater optimism characterising the Liberal-Green alliance than the earlier acrimonious, deviously constructed, and ultimately ill-willed Labor-Green Accord. That both minority governments were short-lived was inevitable, with the Labor-Green Accord foundering over forest exploitation, and the Liberal-Green alliance collapsing under the pressure of Labor and the Greens blocking the 'budget' sale of hydro assets.

Has green politics, because of its core ecocentrism and its political peripheralisation, now reached its ecopolitical limits in Tasmania? Indeed, has it largely achieved its objectives now that Tasmania sees itself as the 'clean, green state'? Is 'green' merely a post materialist manifestation, as Labor hopes, that is bound to fade away (Field, 1997)? Ecocentrism has clearly always placed green politics on the political periphery, so peripheralisation is nothing new to the Greens. Indeed being on the periphery has been a position of strength offering the rare ability to challenge the centre (Pybus and Flanagan, 1990). Tasmania is also an economic periphery that has reaped the rewards of declaring itself a clean, green state with a rich natural and cultural heritage. The Greens will continue to benefit where they pursue aberrations from this clean, green path, particularly where these are the consequence of bi-partisan political neglect. The best case scenario for the Greens' ecocentrist, if not political, objectives, would be the cooption by the major parties of their visions, programs and policies. History has shown, however, that even the Liberal party has been more capable of ecological reinvention than Labor. Labor typically equivocates around the edges of light green issues, embracing the need for improved process rather than improved outcome, whilst on the deeper green issues of resource exploitation, it typically seeks to crush green initiatives. It is Labor that has left the door open, albeit on the periphery, to the persistence of Green politics.

Green politics will persist for as long as it advocates notions of place, development, industry, leadership and power that defy political norms, and for as long as Labor is weighed down by its own conservative anti-environmentalism. Green politics has always been futuristic, urging the state to do better, and by embracing wilderness preservation, eco-tourism and clean, green, as well as clever industry, Tasmania, with its otherwise limited potential, has done better. A state development agenda built upon natural resource exploitation, as Tasmania's has been, will always be an anathema to the Greens, who historically have fought the major parties in their attempts to protect natural areas. Green politics in Tasmania, and indeed Australia, will remain inspired, not only by its magnificent natural areas, but by its pursuit of democratic accountability where such areas are neglected or threatened. In this, Tasmanian conservationists typify conservationists the world over (Paehlke, 1990). Where they differ, however, is in the encouragement that the Hare-Clark electoral system has lent the Tasmanian conservation movement to package its ecocentric core and its activist efforts into what became the world's first green party¹⁶. This pursuit of power has created inner tensions between activism and reformism, between ecocentrist and social democratic agendas, and between adversarial and cooperative political tactics. These are constructive tensions, but they are sorely tested (McCall, 1993), and may be tested still, if the Greens move beyond the political periphery, perhaps next time via green ministries to the centre stage of coalition government.

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¹ The author is grateful to the two reviewers for their feedback, and the pressing by one reviewer in particular to better expand, defend and perhaps modify the point that an ecopolitical focus has peripheralised the Tasmanian Greens. Perhaps it would be simpler to say that just being green, of whatever variety, puts you immediately on the political periphery in Tasmania. There is value however in acknowledging the ecocentric core of Tasmanian green politics and in doing so perhaps prompting some comparative debate on the difficulties of staying green whilst sharing political power.

² The use here of 'green' denotes a descriptive, adjectival sense, whereas 'Green' refers to political grouping. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the intrinsic meaning of green politics, the author recognises the difference between conservationists, environmentalists, green politicians and party politics. Tasmania has witnessed all three, and although the 1970s were generally characterised by the activities of conservationists, the 1980s by more sophisticated environmentalists, and the late 1980s onwards by more formal green politicians and party politics, in effect the United Tasmania Group founded in 1972 inextricably combined these activities into the agenda of the world's first green party.

³ For a definition see Walker (1999).

⁴ The independent was Kevin Lyons, the President of the Centre Party, who held the position of Deputy Leader in the short-lived but highly productive Bethune Liberal Centre Party Coalition Government (1969-72).

⁵ This is an electoral system of proportional representation that has operated in Tasmania's Lower House of Assembly since 1909 with five multi-member electorates that are filled using the single-transferable vote. There are no by-elections, but rather a recount, unless no candidates remain of the same party as the outgoing member, in which case a by-election may be requested. Between 1909 and 1956 the Assembly consisted of thirty members (six for each of five seats). This was enlarged in 1959 to thirty five members to avoid hung parliaments (seven for each of five seats) (Tasmanian Parliamentary Library 1999). In 1998 this was reduced to twenty-five, ostensibly to cut costs, but in effect to disenfranchise independents (Crowley, 2000).

⁶ The Tasmanian Greens were founded in 1989 after five Green Independents were elected to state parliament and gained the balance of power that for a while sustained a Labor government in minority. In effect, these Green Independents were successors to the United Tasmania Group.

⁷ With its ecocentrism Australian environmentalism is quite different to European green politics (Hay and Haward; 1988), founded as the latter has been upon more anthropocentric, human-centred, notions of risk.

⁸ Labor Premier 'Electric' Eric Reece uttered these words in the late 1960s when conservationists began demanding a right to know the impending fate of the Lake Pedder National Park, which (they were to much later find) the Hydro-Electric Commission had intended flooding from at least the middle 1950s. The notion that conservationists should not meddle in public affairs has persisted in Tasmania ever since.

⁹ Labor's long reign in power was broken by Bethune's Liberal Centre Party Coalition government (1969-72).

¹⁰ Indeed there were majority governments returned in only 5 of the 10 elections that Labor contested over this time-frame (Sharman, C. Smith G. and Moon J. 1991, 419).

¹¹ Hydro-inundation received parliamentary approval in a most unaccountable fashion without debate even in the face of growing public concern and before the findings of a Legislative Council inquiry were resolved (Herr and Davis, 1982).

¹² The green vote broadened in the 1980s over the potential pollution of rural-residential (Electrona) and rural-agricultural (Wesley Vale) regions, as well as over the Liberal Gray Government's draconian decision-making practices. As a de facto supporter of these projects, Labor necessarily restricted its criticism to procedural rather than ecological concerns, and so failed to capture the vital protest vote (Crowley, 1996). Furthermore, Tasmanian Green parliamentarians elected in the wake of these disputes have stretched the full yard from ecocentrism, to reformism, to social democratic advocacy.

¹³ Before striking the Labor-Green Accord, the Greens were known as the Green Independents, although they campaigned as a party in the lead up to the 1989 state elections. After winning the balance of power, they formally founded the Tasmanian Greens (*fn 6* above).

¹⁴ At the 1998 election Labor reclaimed majority government for the first time in seventeen years, but not by wooing the Greens. Labor settled for disenfranchisement, a tactic more in keeping with its politics than its own reinvention as a progressive party (Crowley, 2000). That this electoral engineering contravened Labor policy by entrenching the powers of the Legislative Council, a body that Labor has vowed to abolish, was of no consequence. This is precisely the type of game playing that certainly alienates the green intelligentsia, and more broadly, the general public where it overtly spills into anti-democratic, at times anti-environmental tactics.

¹⁵ Labor opposed the Liberal's state budget financing strategy which essentially rested upon the sale of hydro-electricity assets as a means of retiring debt, improving the economy and creating jobs. The Greens also opposed the sale, although

they favoured a fifty year lease option that was spurned by Labor almost as a matter of course. Assured that the Greens' bottom line was no outright sale of hydro assets, Labor unequivocally opposed the government's strategy, thus pushing it into calling an early election (Crowley, 1999b, 186).

¹⁶ Proportional voting systems have delivered similar advantages to Greens elsewhere, notably to European Green Parties.