Structure and Ideology in the Tasmanian Labor Party: Postmaterialism and Party change

By

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Peter Patmore

23rd February 2000.

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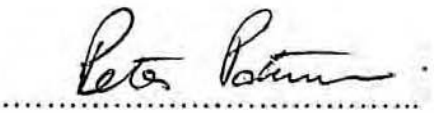

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ABSTRACT

The Tasmanian Labor Party has found itself, like many western social democratic parties, recently subject to challenge; not from its traditional enemy, the economic right, but from a new postmaterialist left. This thesis considers the concept of postmaterialism, its rise and role in the formation of new ecocentric political parties, and its impact on the structure, ideology and electoral strategy of the Tasmanian Labor Party.

Maurice Duverger's typology of political parties has been used to elucidate and consider the characteristics and formation of political parties and the importance of electoral systems – particularly proportional representation – in achieving representational success. This typology, coupled with Ronald Inglehart's concept of postmaterialism shows how a conflict of values and a new ecocentric ideology has given rise to new environmental movements and green political parties.

This thesis finds that, in a Tasmanian context, both the Labor Party's history and the impact of Tasmania's peculiar electoral system contributed to the emergence of environmental parties in Tasmania. Further, it finds that the strength of their emergence and the significance of postmaterialism's ecocentric ideology necessitated a serious response from Tasmanian Labor. National and Labor Party surveys, confirmed the existence and persistence of postmaterialism – both in the broader Tasmanian community and the Tasmanian ALP.

As a result of this research, it is argued that some options in meeting the postmaterialist challenge could not be utilised by the Tasmanian Labor Party. Major structural reform would not be effective and ideological renewal would have only limited effect. Thus, the Party has pursued a strategy of retaining party unity while attempting to attract sufficient postmaterialist support to gain majority government.

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ADDENDUM

The danger for any author is finding a suitable point at which to conclude. I had chosen the leadership change from Michael Field to Jim Bacon for it seemed, at that stage, major changes prior to an election were unlikely. However, just as the final draft had been written, legislation was introduced which altered the electoral system to the advantage of both the major parties. Anyone reading this work should be aware of these changed circumstances.

The new Leader of the Labor Opposition, Jim Bacon, introduced the *Parliamentary Reform Bill 1998* into the House of Assembly in May 1998. Its main provision was to cut the numbers of the House of Assembly from 35 to 25 and the Legislative Council from 19 to 15. The members of the House of Assembly were to be elected from the existing five electoral divisions, thus raising the quota necessary for election from 12.5 percent to over 16 percent. The second reading of the Bill was defeated by the Government on the 22nd of May 1998.

But the Premier, Tony Rundle, under public and party pressure recalled Parliament on the 22nd of July 1998 for the express purpose of legislating to cut the size of the House of Assembly from 35 to 25; effectively accepting the model preferred by the Labor Party.

In each vote taken during the passage of the *Parliamentary reform Bill 1998* the Government and the Labor opposition voted together. Despite intense and heated opposition by the Greens, the Bill passed rapidly through both the House of Assembly and the Legislative Council, commencing operation on the 28th of July 1998. In the election which followed in August 1998 Labor was returned with 14 seats, the Liberals were reduced to 10 and only one Green in the division of Franklin, Mrs Putt, overcame the increased quota to retain her seat.

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