

12 April 2023

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There have been two elections recently where the reins have changed hands from the Coalition to Labor.

The NSW election saw a transfer of power from a minority Coalition government to a minority Labor government. Labor needed 47 seats to govern in its own right but fell short by 2. However, on election night, three successful independents committed to support Labor and that enabled a smooth transition.

Final numbers are:

Party	Seats	% of total vote	Swing
ALP	45	37.0%	+3.6%
Coalition	36	35.4%	-6.2%
Greens	3	9.7%	+0.1%
Independent	9	8.8%	+4.0%
Other	0	9.2%	+1.3%
TOTAL	93	100.0%	

The Federal seat of Aston, in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, also changed hands. Labor took the seat with a swing to it of 8.3%

Party	Seats	% of total vote	Swing
ALP	Won	40.9%	+8.3%
Coalition	Lost	39.1%	-4.0%
Greens		10.1%	-2.0%
Independent		7.1%	+7.1%
Other		2.9%	-9.5%
Informal		3.3%	

In both instances the gap between the two major parties was less than 2%, and in both instances the winner won with less than 50% of the vote. In one sense, these results will possibly provide some comfort for the Coalition, however the trend is there and it is ominous.

Many commentators have asked the question – where to now for the Liberals? It seems many in the Party believe it needs to move further to the right. To them I say - if you walk away from the centre, then the centre will walk away from you. Which it is presently in the process of doing – to the Teals (the beginning of a new centre right movement?) or to Labor.

I was fascinated by the language used by the two major parties on election night in Victoria. The Labor candidate said: I was promoting our policies to the people – on the doors, in the shopping centres etc etc. - The Liberal leader said: Our brand was toxic in Victoria, It was just too hard to sell our product to the Victorian market.

One seemed to be saying – having a relationship with people, whereas the other was saying – it was a transactional arrangement for a product in a market. Translated, one is listening, the other isn't. Which seems to say it all, really.

The Voice

I find it strange that the Liberals have made a decision that the shadow cabinet will be bound to support the "NO" case, while the backbench will have a free vote. Apart from the obvious dichotomy between the two groups of people, why bind some but not others? Or to put it another way, why give some a free vote, but not others? If it is a conscience vote for some, why not all?

Furthermore, it exposes a division within the Party, which leaves itself open to attack, and presumably at a time when the Party wants to be united? How can you prosecute a case as a Party when the Party is not bound to support it? And if it is so contentious, then why not have an open vote for all? Talk about digging a hole! Now two senior members have resigned, one (the former Minister for Indigenous Affairs) from the Party altogether, the other the Shadow Attorney General from Shadow Cabinet. I suspect they won't be the last. These are "significant losses", and a heavy price to pay for taking such a stance.

So, taking a Tasmanian-centric point of view, hats off to the Tasmanian Premier and to the Liberal member for Bass, for standing up to what they believe to be the proper thing to do. I endorse their stand. I hope their party does as well.

A Minister for SNAFU'S

The Minister for Racing, Science and Technology, Advanced Manufacturing and Defence Industries and Science and Technology is also the Minister for Small Business, which probably now has every small business owner worried.

The Minister was quick to throw her credentials into the ring when campaigning for a seat in Parliament. Not just a lawyer, but one with extensive experience, including international experience (UNESCO, none less). And well versed in technology, having been a General Manager at Telstra, in Commercial and Contracts. That is quite a CV. Obviously a very talented person

At least until she was put to the test in her present role. The concept of governance in the racing industry has been sorely lacking, and remains so. Having lost control over the debate about loss of data to hackers, she has responded to a question regarding whether a ransom has been sought "Not yet!". Not yet indeed! Not her finest hour!

Now it has been suggested that in the interests of good governance nothing more be said about the data hack. Keeping everyone in the dark is not good governance. With over 150,000 persons affected by this breach, the horse has well and truly bolted.

Bernard Salt

Bernard Salt is an entertaining speaker, no question. And he had the audience enthralled with his presentation recently on Tassie's future prospects and opportunities, sponsored by The Mercury newspaper. Like previous talks he has given to Tasmanian audiences, he stressed the advantage of having hydro-electricity as the main source of power.

However, in promoting the cause, he made reference to a set of statistics which suggested an influx of persons with cash and qualifications, courtesy of Covid, and talked of the opportunity to harness this talent and resource.

The trouble was, according to demographer Lisa Denny, he got the stats wrong. Denny has made the point that there are similar numbers leaving as arriving, and much of the data relating to an influx is overseas students and fruit pickers.

As much as I might want to be swayed by Salt's argument, it does have to be based on fact. And if his data is to be used for planning purposes, all the more reason for him to get it right.

Power supply

As coal plants reach end-of-life, an obvious transition fuel is gas, if -as I suspect most would argue - we need to ensure the lights stay on.

Coal is reaching the end of its use as a fuel source, it is salutary to recognize it is still THE MAJOR fuel source. Talking down coal simply encourages the earlier than necessary closure of coal generators, with nothing yet in place to fill that gap.

Gas is an obvious alternative, but gas is also in the gun, and no-one is particularly interested in embracing it as a long-term fuel source. Nor does the political dynamic lend itself to such arguments as we rush headlong into the brave new world of renewables.

It's silly really, that we move away from reliable source of power to an unreliable source of power, and to feel so good about it. Because behind all the rhetoric unreliability, that is the reality. Without a reliable source of firming power (i.e. keeping the pressure constant in the pipe (to use a water analogy)), the system will not be able to cope, and battery power is nowhere near adequate to handle it. What are the options?

I have always believed that nuclear power was an obvious source of power for Australia to embrace. It is reliable, it is clean, it is safe, it can be used as firming power, and is an obvious substitute for coal and gas. And we have the raw material, and plenty of it.

I would understand the reticence if it was a new source of energy, but it isn't. France has 56 reactors, the USA 92, the UK 9, Sweden 6, China 48 and the list goes on. Even Finland has 5. And all of these are running safely. It is not the fearful demon that the rhetoric would have us believe.

So it was with great interest to read that a Finnish Green Party member, Tea Tormanen, presently in Australia, had called on Australia to drop its "dangerous and unscientific objections" to nuclear power.

Approximately one year ago, Finland's Green Party voted to endorse nuclear power as a clean energy source, and Ms. Tormanen has called on the Australian Greens to follow suit.

The response, zip.

Maybe we need to wait for millions of dollars to be spent embracing renewables, only to discover their continuing unreliability and/or unsuitability, and for the lights to start blinking before we stop burying our collective heads in the sand and face up to such a reality.