

Australian Greens make overtures to big business Labor government

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Over the past fortnight, the Australian Greens have made several overtures to the Labor government, offering compromise agreements to help the Albanese administration pass stalled legislation through the Senate.

With the parliamentary sitting year drawing to a close, it appears unlikely that the deals will happen. But that is not because of the Greens' intransigence or because their compromise offers involve ambitious social reforms.

Instead, Labor is refusing to budge. With all polling indicating record low support for Labor, the government is refusing to collaborate with the Greens as part of its assurances to the ruling elite that it is determined to avoid any sort of coalition with the minor party after the next federal election, which must be called by May.

While they may come to nothing in the short term, the Greens' overtures are highly revealing. They demonstrate that the party's denunciations of the major parties is posturing, aimed at picking up electoral support amid growing social and political opposition. The Greens, however, are an establishment party, committed to the parliamentary order and to collaborating with big business governments.

The areas of compromise are also striking. The Greens are offering substantial concessions on two areas that they campaign on most frequently—the housing crisis and the destruction of the environment.

In its first olive branch, the Greens offered to help Labor to pass two pieces of housing legislation, the Help to Buy first home buyer scheme and its build-to-rent program.

The Greens have previously made the obvious point that neither scheme will address the housing crisis. Under the Help to Buy scheme, the government would contribute a portion of the equity required for some 40,000 first-time home buyers to purchase a house.

Mortgage repayments would still be exorbitant under conditions of high interest rates after the Reserve Bank of

Australia's thirteen hikes. The sudden increase in buyers would help drive up record property prices, already at a median of over \$1.6 million in Sydney.

The build-to-rent scheme is an even more transparent boondoggle for property developers. They would receive government handouts, in the form of tax concessions, to build apartments that would then be put on the private rental market. In Sydney, the median asking rent for a unit surpassed \$700 a week for the first time on record.

The only provision in the bill for addressing the grossly unaffordable situation is that one of every ten subsidised build-to-rent units would need to be 25 percent cheaper than the other nine, which would be at a standard market rent. Housing affordability advocates have pointed out that this will do nothing.

The scale of the crisis was underscored by modelling from the Impact Economics and Policy Group, which found that up to 3.2 million people across the country are at risk of homelessness amid the soaring rental prices in a country of 25 million.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) article, reporting the Greens' overture, noted that the minor party had “wound back” previous demands that it had earlier presented as conditions for supporting Labor's two pieces of housing legislation. The Greens had previously demanded rental price caps and an end to tax breaks for property developers, such as negative gearing and capital gains concessions.

But those demands were absent in a letter from Greens MP Max Chandler-Mather to Labor's housing minister Clare O'Neil. The only substantial measure Chandler-Mather proposed, in exchange for the Greens' legislative support, was that the Labor government commit to beginning the construction of 25,000 homes next year under its Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF).

The selection of Chandler-Mather to send the pathetic letter was not accidental. He has previously been among

the most strident Greens' MPs in pointing to the housing crisis and the utter inadequacy of all of the government's proposed "solutions." Chandler-Mather's letter signalled that those previous declarations were posturing, and even the more "militant" Greens' MPs are willing to "engage constructively" with the government's pro-developer policies.

There is irony in Chandler-Mather's previous skewering of the HAFF concept in popular social media videos. As he noted, the HAFF is a speculative venture that does not guarantee the construction of any houses, let alone genuinely affordable dwellings.

The government effectively invests money in the stock market through a series of convoluted mechanisms. If there are any returns on those investments, the HAFF can use them to give grants to non-government organisations to build dwellings in conjunction with the state and territory administrations.

These are not public housing stock. Instead they are "social housing," often more expensive and precarious than public housing, and managed by non-government organisations. Others are "affordable" dwellings, but that "affordability" is pegged to soaring market rates.

Housing advocates have previously estimated that the shortfall of social housing dwellings is already 524,000, and could exceed 670,000 over the next decade. In that context, the Greens' call for 25,000 houses to be built is tinkering around the edges, no different to Labor's own phony posturing.

In their other climbdown, this time on environmental issues, the Greens' offered this week to help pass Labor's Nature Positive legislation. The bill would increase penalties for illegal native forest logging and would establish an environmental protection authority and a data-gathering body.

As the Greens previously noted, this was all window-dressing, to provide the Labor government with environmental credentials, under conditions in which it is permitting the establishment of new coal and gas projects and presiding over an increase to Australia's carbon emissions. The Greens had earlier demanded a "climate trigger" be included in the legislation, which would examine the climate impacts of new projects and could halt them if they were deemed to have deleterious consequences for the environment.

But having stridently insisted on the need for such a "trigger" the Greens have now dropped it.

While they have been rebuffed, the overtures are not one offs or simply the purview of those responsible for

the relevant ministries. Greens leader Adam Bandt has repeatedly emphasised the party's overall willingness to collaborate with Labor, and has bemoaned its refusal to come to the table.

In the lead-up to an election, which may well result in a hung parliament, the Greens are signaling their willingness to prop up a minority Labor government, that would be committed to militarism, war and austerity. That is what the Greens did between 2010 and 2013, when they were in a formal coalition with the minority Gillard Labor government, as it aligned Australia with the US drive to war against China, conducted a homicidal troop surge in Afghanistan, persecuted refugees and took the knife to healthcare, education and welfare.

That record, and the Greens' overtures, show that there are no non-negotiables for such a power-sharing arrangement to be resurrected after the coming election. Over the past year, the Greens have condemned Labor for its complicity in the Gaza genocide, accurately pointing out the government's political, diplomatic and material culpability in the mass slaughter of Palestinians. But even Labor's role in a 21st century Holocaust has not stopped the Greens from offering to collaborate with this rotten party of genocide and war.

That is because the Greens themselves are a pro-capitalist order, fully committed to the existing dictatorship of the banks and big business. Their posturing on the genocide, as well as the social and environmental crisis, serves as a safety valve for the parliamentary order, promoting the illusion that there is some alternative within the official set-up, when there is not.

Above all, the activities of the Greens are directed against the development of the socialist and revolutionary movement of the working class, that must be built to end the genocide, reverse climate change and resolve the housing and social crisis, through a frontal assault on the looted wealth of the oligarchy.



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