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Australian election 2010 ~ Richard Curchin

On August 21, Australians went to the polls to elect a new government. The result was a 'hung' parliament in the House of Representatives, the lower house of federal parliament; the Liberal/Nation parties' conservative coalition won 73 seats, the Labor party 72 seats, the Green Party one seat, and four independent MPs were elected.

The last Australian Federal election was held in 2007, Australia elect their federal members every three years. The 2007 election was won convincingly by the Kevin Rudd-led Labor Party after 13 years of rule by John Howard's conservative Liberal/Nation coalition.

The Rudd government started well but floundered in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, despite Australia having weathered the financial storm better than any Western country due to continued exports of coal and iron ore to China.

4 Independents To Decide

After negotiations following August's election, the Green Party (which currently holds the balance of power in the Australian Senate, with 9 of the 76 seats) decided to support a Labor-led coalition government, giving another vote to the Labor side of the house.

This left the four independent MPs to choose who should form government. Thus the outcome of a 13 million person vote rested with four people. But these were well-educated people, well versed in politics.

Three of the independents are ex-members of the Nation Party, a rural-based conservative party. All three had fallen out with the Nation Party and have previously held seats as independents. Well-informed people, whose backgrounds are political science, economics, mining and farming, they were not prepared to toe the party line; they had the confidence of their predominantly conservative electors.

The fourth independent, Andrew Wilke, the former intelligence analyst and Iraq War whistle-blower has an altogether different background. From Tasmania, after a career in the Australian Army, he worked as an analyst in

the Australian intelligence agency—the Office of National Assessments (ONA). He resigned from ONA before the start of the Iraq war claiming that there was no threat from Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and that the evidence cited by the USA and UK had been fabricated. Since 2003 he was written *Axis of Deceit*, stood as a Green senate candidate in 2007, and been a popular public speaker.

His views are well known, he supports reform in mental health and dental health, areas which need reform in Australia and is generally pro welfare state and a fair-go for all Australians. He also supports a more humane treatment of refugees and anti-discrimination on all fronts. Not surprisingly he opted to support a Labor-led government.

This left the other three independent MPs undecided. Nicknamed 'The Three Amigos', Bob Katter, Rob Oakeshott and Tony Windsor demanded and got agreement from both sides of the house to reform the parliamentary standing orders and to make Question Time relevant. Question Time had become a national disgrace. Hardly any attempt is made to answer questions sensibly, and half the questions are Dorothy Dix questions—designed to allow government ministers a few minutes of air time (or should it be hot air time) without answering any particular question.

Other reform were also agreed, principally the pairing of members unable to vote, and the role of an independent speaker. These reforms are designed to make government possible with a small majority in the House of Representatives.

However, The Three Amigos greatest achievement was to sit down with the Secretary to the Treasury, Dr Ken Henry and go through the costings of the two main parties election promises. This they did, and to the annoyance of both parties, they then published them. There were some holes in the costings of the Liberal/National coalition policies.

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Bob Katter (the 'Mad Katter'), the member for Lindsey, an electorate about twice the size of the UK, decided that he could not incur the wrath of his conservative northern Queensland rural electors and threw his hat in with the National/Liberal coalition.

After two weeks of negotiations, Rob Oakeshott and Tony Windsor, after being offered bribes and suffering threats, decided to support the Labor-led coalition; giving it 76 votes to 74.

The independents' aim is to get stable minority government for Australia for the next three years. The chance of that happening is slightly higher than that of their being re-elected to their present seats.

The new government says it will be a middle of the road government concentrating on reforms on health, taxation, telecommunications, infrastructure and climate change mitigation.

After a very negative election campaign Australians should be grateful that there are politicians who still have principles and even more grateful that the election was decided by people who knew what they were voting for. ☞

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