

New Australian Labor Government: The First Attack on the Independents: PM Albanese Hobbles the Crossbench

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It did not take long for the new Australian Labor government to flex its muscle foolishly in response to the large crossbench of independents and small party members of Parliament. Despite promising a new age of transparency and accountability after the election of May 21, one of the first notable acts of the Albanese government was to attack the very people who gave voice to that movement. Dangerously, old party rule, however slim, is again found boneheaded and wanting.

The decision, delivered with an arrogant casualness before another international sojourn by **Prime Minister Anthony Albanese**, centred on the staffing arrangements for the newly elected independent members of parliament. Prior to getting on a plane, Albanese [sent a letter](#) to independent members promising to cut the staffing allocation for crossbench MPs and Senators from eight to five each. Of the five would also be one advisor, down from four in the previous Morrison government.

On the surface, the government did not see it as problematic, because those in government tend to see the absurd as entirely normal. Albanese himself was found defending a series of spurious positions, citing “fairness and equity” and lack of sustainability. In a classic conceptual misunderstanding, the Prime Minister [seemed to think](#) that a government backbencher was somehow equivalent to an independent representative. It was not fair, for instance, that the independent **MP Zali Steggall** “should have double the representation in terms of staff of electorates in the same region.”

Indeed, Albanese went so far as to toffee coat the new arrangements. Independents, [he told](#) Radio National’s Sabra Lane, “will have more staff than major party representatives. And the additional staff will have travel rights that major party backbenchers won’t have. They’ll be on higher salaries.”

Then, as if suggesting something sinister, the PM noted “a circumstance whereby I didn’t

know, and I can't find any great record of any publicity, for the fact that some crossbenchers had double the staff that other backbenchers had." Had Albanese bothered to consult documents tabled in Parliament, Steggall has [pointedly remarked](#), he could have easily seen what those arrangements actually were.

It seems to have eluded the member for Grayndler that Labor members of parliament, and those of the Liberals and Nationals, do not need as many staff members because the party itself decides the various policy positions and arguments. Independents, precisely because they do not call upon such an apparatus, need to exercise judgment that is more informed and, if necessary, sceptical. Nor can they, not being either members of government or the official opposition, call upon advice from ministerial departments.

What Albanese and his ministers have also suggested is that more resources will be given to the Federal Parliament Library, as if that somehow cures staff shortages. There will also be access to clerks responsible for drafting legislation, "in addition to personal staff."

Groupthink, or non-think, are not imperatives of the responsible independent MP. They, as the newly elected independent Senator for the ACT, **David Pocock** has [noted](#), must traverse a number of fields of enormous complexity and detail, requiring research, consulting with experts and people legislation would affect. "This isn't about parliamentarians or staff," he [insists](#), "it's about listening to and respecting our communities." To do so, one had to be accessible, consult widely and make "politics about people."

The newly elected senator for the United Australia Party, **Ralph Babet**, is also of the [view](#) that the cuts placed "the brakes on our ability to scrutinise the government and the legislation they may propose." A spokesperson for One Nation [also smelled](#) a rat lurking behind the decision. "If you're not adequately staffed that means this government expects legislation to be rammed through without proper consideration."

Leaving aside the needs of such representatives, the staffers themselves, notably for those attached to smaller parties and non-aligned parliamentarians, [endure](#) a job described by one as "bloody" and "excruciatingly hard." Such a staffer faces any number of threats to life and limb in addition to [confronting](#) dozens of government amendments to lengthy bills, backed by the opposition, with only a day's notice.

Having created a needlessly suicidal storm, the government now faces the prospect of "going slow" approaches to the passing of legislation, notably in the Senate. Another view, one [expressed](#) by One Nation, is to adopt a default position of rejecting legislation that has not been properly scrutinised. The Albanese government has done wonders to return to the orthodoxy of a broken system by attempting to consolidate the power of the two-party duopoly.

Beyond the immediacy of impending parliamentary business, graver consequences may face Labor, with the freshly victorious giant slayer, Kooyong **MP Monique Ryan**, [promising](#) a second wave of independents to target Labor marginal seats in Melbourne at the 2025 election.

Having kicked them in the proverbial teeth, **Finance Minister Katy Gallagher** [is hopeful](#) that "respectful and constructive engagement" will be possible with the freshly enraged crossbench. Even before the first sitting of Parliament, things promise to be rowdy.

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