

The Liberals' Rudd

The Turnbull coup has finished off one Liberal leader and put paid to two others

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On 14 September last, 54 Liberal parliamentary members voted to sack the man who had first led them from a hopeless late-2009 electoral position in Opposition to near-victory in 2010, and then a 2013 landslide win. Some 44 colleagues voted to keep faith.

Those who, like myself, remain appalled by that have since been enjoined – including by commentators formerly seen as Abbott supporters – to ‘get over it’ and ‘accept the pollsters’ verdicts’. Well, I’m sorry, but as Margaret Thatcher famously told her Conservative Party colleagues: ‘You turn if you want to. The lady’s not for turning’. Nor am I.

Why not? Because if treachery and betrayal on this scale are not punished, they will beget more such treachery and betrayal, as Labor Party experience amply demonstrates.

I therefore said recently in the *Australian Financial Review* that I will never vote Liberal (or give that party my effective voting preference) while it is led ‘by Malcolm Turnbull and his fellow conspirators’. I don’t think I am alone. The imminent North Sydney by-election may shed light on that.

Feelings, however, are one thing. More important will be actions. But first, two preliminary points need stating.

First, as many have noted, Tony Abbott was far from blameless in the lead-up to his assassination. It would be tedious to reiterate his many mistakes. Nevertheless, as I wrote in the *Australian* only six days before the coup, ‘there is today no credible alternative as Leader of the Liberal Party’. Apart from Scott Morrison (to whom I shall return), ‘while it would be invidious to comment personally [on other contenders], none of them is up to the job’. ‘Whatever the opinion polls may say, in 12 months the electorate can be trusted to arrive at the only sensible conclusion’ – a view with which the *Australian*, despite its newly-found love-in with Mr Turnbull, now concurs.

Second, everything now depends for us ‘recalcitrants’ on Abbott’s own future

actions. Two things are vital: he must recontest Warringah next year; and he must continue to speak out, not via that ‘door-stop’ sniping so ruthlessly used against him by Turnbull himself, but through considered speeches on national issues of great moment. He has already done so on world security and the future of Europe in his outstanding Margaret Thatcher Memorial Lecture. Being now free to do so, he could lead the needed campaign against the largely ill-motivated push for homosexual ‘marriage’. Similarly, he can expose the gigantic ‘global warming’ hoax as the ‘crap’ he once, rightly, called it. When he does so, crowds will flock to his banner.

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One prerequisite is that Abbott must resist the many offers to quit politics and make more money, less stressfully, in the private sector – a course already urged upon him by many journalists chiefly notable previously for denigrating him.

Those two preliminaries established, consider our now transformed political situation. The Canberra press gallery can opine as much as it likes; the fact remains that the Australian electorate is basically conservative. Yet the Liberal Party is now led by a man without a conservative bone in his body, whose significant actions have long been directed to destroying the values that party used to, and largely still does, stand for. (For an extensive and well-documented record, see www.stop-turnbull.com.) In July 2013 I described Turnbull (to a very senior Liberal) as being ‘in many respects, the Kevin Rudd of the Liberal Party – vengeful, devious and unscrupulous, a cultivator of the press gallery and of each and every other “dissident” who might be sitting on the Coalition benches’. Right then, right now.

The National Party (of which for four years I was a member) is thus now in coalition with a man of whom its own members are deeply, and rightly, suspicious – as underlined by the fact that, post-coup, Turnbull was forced to accede to a new Coalition agreement making important concessions to the Nationals, *and to do so in writing*.

To consider one possible future action, therefore, what would prevent the Nationals, after next year’s election, from formally separating from the Liberals? – still providing ministers, and supporting the government on supply and confidence, but free to paddle their own policy canoe without being bound by Cabinet responsibility. Western Australia’s Nationals pursued that course some years ago; and after all, a Prime Minister who, over the past two years, rarely missed an opportunity to ignore Cabinet responsibility while dumping on Abbott, could hardly object.

Consider also this: while the Turnbull conspirators set out to destroy one Liberal leader, they have in fact destroyed the putative leadership of two others. Post-coup revelations, still emerging, have certainly ended any thought of Julie Bishop ever becoming the first female Liberal leader. The term ‘duplicitous’, initially voiced by Premier Colin Barnett, now looks like understatement.

Those revelations have done the same for Scott Morrison – of whom a senior party official to whom I spoke on 17 September said, ‘Morrison is finished: nobody will ever trust him again’. You have to hand it to Turnbull: his destruction of the Liberal Party has been so complete that, were he to fall under the proverbial bus tomorrow, there is now no one remaining (Abbott apart) to replace him. Meanwhile, out in Liberal Party heartland, pre-selection retribution plans are afoot. Two seats that spring immediately to mind are Berowra (Ruddock) and Mackellar (B. Bishop). In Oliver Cromwell’s famous words, they have sat too long; and, having betrayed Abbott, ‘in the name of God, go!’ But while we are about it, why not a challenge to Turnbull himself in Wentworth, with a good Independent Liberal ‘recalcitrant’ directing preferences to the Greens (and yes, I do mean putting Turnbull even behind the Greens!)?

As for the plotters themselves, the four Senators among them will doubtless be temporarily safe enough. Messrs Hendy, Brough and Roy, however, would do well to watch their backs. As the Mafia says (and Talleyrand said it before them, albeit of course in French), revenge is a dish best eaten cold.

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