

## **Turnbull's rhetoric on Rudd is haunting him with a vengeance**

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It may not be better than sex but the high that comes from making a great stirring speech in the parliament leaves you feeling pretty good about yourself.

Given the ego of our Prime Minister, he is always feeling pretty good about himself, but when he rose back in 2009 as opposition leader to challenge the prospect of Kevin Rudd calling a double-dissolution election, he thought he had taken parliamentary oratory to a new level.

Few people are possessed of his vast vocabulary and he used this to craft a brilliant critique of Rudd and his plans.

The result was wonderful rhetoric that was the subject of both written and audio recordings.

How Malcolm Turnbull must wish he had not opened his mouth. His colleagues then would have slapped him on the back and praised him to the skies. His current colleagues are now only able to shake their heads and mutter their dark thoughts.

Try these words on for size: "The Prime Minister hasn't, cannot even summon up the courage to try to fix this mess. His threat of a double dissolution and an early election prove to all of us what this budget is all about. "It isn't about protecting the jobs of Australians — least of all the one million it says will soon be out of work. "It is about the job security of one man and one man only. A prime minister frightened of the consequences of his mismanagement now wants to cut and run before he is found out."

For sure he didn't miss Rudd. Now the press gallery, Bill Shorten and Uncle Tom Copley won't miss him.

There could be no better words to use to describe the Rudd-like mess into which the PM and his government have now descended.

There can be no doubt that all the talk and the verbal gymnastics about a double-dissolution election in early July (the election could be on July 2, July 9 or July 16), or about bringing the budget forward by one week, or about bringing the parliament back for an extra week, comes down to "one job" for "one man" who wants to "cut and run before he gets found out".

Turnbull will be having nightmares about that speech and so he should. The parallels between Rudd in 2009 and Turnbull in 2016 could not have been catalogued more vividly.

To proceed down the double-dissolution route will lead to ridicule and derision. To walk away from that chosen path, as the Prime Minister did with a GST increase and substantive changes to negative gearing, risks the budget being dissected by the economists, and being consigned to the box with the label "uninspired, gutless and useless".

I keep asking myself how it is possible that a man who could design and deliver a speech like that one from 2009 could be such an abject failure in delivering on his own promises to craft an "economic narrative" with which he could hope to sell his economic message.

Seven months from the knifing of former prime minister Tony Abbott there is no narrative and no message. The ship of state is adrift. There is no one at the tiller and we must all hope that no reef, rocks or icebergs loom in the ship's course.

Just two weeks ago I began my column thus: “On the assumption that neither the Prime Minister nor his Special Minister of State are stupid, then the introduction of legislation to change the system of voting in Senate elections can only mean one thing — a double-dissolution election will take place on Saturday, July 2.”

Well, dear readers, I must confess that I got part of that wrong. The Prime Minister does intend to hold the double dissolution on July 2 but, sadly, he has proven the other part of my statement correct — he is stupid.

The column went on to say that, during the sitting times between now and the budget, “the Senate will vote on the prospect of establishing the Australian Building and Construction Commission”.

I did not know at the time, and still find it hard to believe, that the government had struck a really dumb deal with the Greens to hold back that legislation. The consequences of this ill-conceived, hopelessly negotiated deal is that now a genuine double-dissolution trigger (that is, a great opportunity to go union and Bill Shorten-bashing on the back of Dyson Heydon’s Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption) is very hard to manufacture.

Both the government and the opposition have an opinion from the Clerk of the Senate that the Senate needs only to reject debate on the Australian Building and Construction Commission bill three times and that will provide the trigger.

This technicality is one thing but the politics is another. The arrogance involved in going to the people without even having a proper debate on the bill that is so important that it could form the basis of an election is breathtaking.

If it is that big a deal, it should be worth a proper debate.

There is a trigger already in place of course, but it is of such trite national significance that if you ask the first 100 people you meet today if they are aware of a problem with “registered organisations”, not one of them will know what you are talking about.

If the budget is brought forward or the parliament brought back at huge expense to provide the union-bashing trigger, then the PM will face an arduous, dangerous, 8½-week election campaign in which every single voter will be assured of the Prime Minister’s position — that “it is about the job security of one man”.

At some point, Turnbull must understand that his lifelong ambition is underwhelming. He wanted the top job all his life and he clawed his way over the likes of Brendan Nelson and Abbott to get there.

Being there isn’t enough. It is what you do while you are there that matters and at this point he has done little or nothing.

The Liberals are in a fine mess. They threw out the bloke who they said had no judgment.

In his place they elected a bloke who has no ticker.