

DEL-CON NOTES

John Stone

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

With the Labor-lite Budget behind us and 49 days to the election, conservative Liberal voters – who Liberal Party pollster Mark Textor dismissively said ‘had nowhere else to go’ – are asking, ‘How shall we vote? What are the rules of engagement?’

When nations send armed forces into conflict, they prescribe ‘rules of engagement’ for their servicemen and -women to observe. While aiming to attack the enemy, they should avoid, so far as reasonably possible, inflicting ‘collateral damage’ on innocent bystanders. Conservative Liberal voters want to attack their Labor enemies on 2 July. But the more they succeed in that, the more collateral damage they will inevitably inflict on innocent Australians, themselves included, by returning a government led by Malcolm Turnbull, who has never really been a Liberal. (For a well-documented record of his true views, see www.stopturnbull.com).

Even more importantly, such an outcome will be taken as justifying the political assassination of Tony Abbott, who had led Liberals back from the political wilderness to which Turnbull had earlier consigned them, to a smashing electoral victory. But as stated here on 5 December, ‘If treachery and betrayal on this scale are not punished, they will beget more such treachery and betrayal, as Labor Party experience amply demonstrates’.

How then to avoid these unacceptable outcomes? Let me suggest some voting rules of engagement.

Rule 1: For the House of Representatives, wherever possible vote National. National Party Coalition members (including the half-dozen Liberal National Party members who choose to sit with the Nats rather than the Liberals) had no hand in Turnbull’s conspiracy last September. Thus, voting National (which of course will only be possible where Nationals are standing) will attack the enemy without supporting Turnbull or his co-conspirators.

Rule 2: Obtain a list of those 56 Liberals who, last September, voted (or in two cases would have voted if

present) to oust Abbott. Andrew Bolt recently referred to such a list at www.trueblueNZ.com, naming 40 Members and 16 Senators. I have checked that list with an impeccable and well-informed source, and it is accurate. Those people – the Mark of Cain upon their foreheads – are your targets.

Rule 3: Ascertain whether your own Liberal MP is on that list. If not, vote for him or her with a clear conscience; but if so, when completing your ballot paper you must put that miscreant last. And last means last; our compulsory preferential voting system means that, if you merely place that person midway (say) down your list of preferences, he or she will probably still attract your vote.

Nine of those 56 targets have already been dispatched via impending retirements, voluntary or involuntary (Bronwyn Bishop and Dennis Jensen). You therefore need to assess their pre-selected replacements. In Mackellar, for example, where Bishop was deservedly dismissed a month ago, her replacement (Jason Falinski) is even further Left than Turnbull; so put him last. Similar judgments will be needed for those pre-selected to replace Baldwin (Paterson), Brough (Fisher), Gambaro (Brisbane), Jensen (Tangney), Macfarlane (Groom), Ruddock (Berowra) and Southcott (Boothby). Stone (Murray) is already covered by Rule 1.

Similar rules are needed for the Senate, where all 12 places in each State will be contested.

Rule 4: Suppose you reside in New South Wales. Your list includes three NSW Liberal Senators (Heffernan, Payne and Sinodinos), one of whom (Heffernan) is retiring. The joint Liberal/National NSW Senate list for the election has not yet been finalized, but assume it contains (say) seven names – five Liberals, including your two remaining targets, Payne and Sinodinos, and two Nationals.

Under this Rule it is now imperative that you vote below the line. The new Senate voting procedures make it relatively easy to do so by numbering, in order, only 12 squares. So you can begin (see Rule 1) by numbering the two Nationals 1 and 2, and then three of those Liberals from 3 through 5, but – and this is the key point –

omitting Payne and Sinodinos. Finding seven more candidates from acceptably ‘conservative’ parties to make up your 12 will be easy – Family First, Australian Liberty Alliance, Christian Democrats, Liberal Democrats, Shooters and Fishers and so on.

So far, so relatively straightforward. However, if a good many conservative Liberal voters follow these rules, what is the likely outcome?

Each case will be different. In my own electorate (North Sydney), where Trent Zimmerman was elected last December to replace Joe Hockey (on which, see my article in *Quadrant’s* May issue), his big margin means that my putting him last will have little effect, other than to deprive the party of public funding (\$2.60) it would otherwise receive. In Mackellar, however, where a strongly conservative Independent (Jim Ball) will be running, your vote for him while putting Jason Falinski last could help Falinski lose that seat despite Bishop’s previous huge margin. That may be a bit of a stretch; but in marginal seats such as Lindsay (3.0 per cent), enough formerly Liberal voters putting Fiona Scott last could well, and rightly, see the back of a woman who, having been elected on Abbott’s coat-tails, then betrayed him.

In the aggregate, consider five broadly possible outcomes: the Coalition returned with an overall majority little less than its current one (26 post-redistributions); returned with a net loss of (say) eight seats (regaining Fairfax but losing nine others) and overall majority 10; returned with a net loss of (say) 12 seats and bare overall majority of 2; Coalition losing (say) a net 14 seats, with a hung Parliament and Labor doing a Gillard-style deal to form government; or an outright loss to Labor. Even the second of these, and certainly any of the last three, would imply the need for a new Liberal leader to replace the one who had once again led them to near, or actual, defeat.

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