

DEL-CON NOTES

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ELECTION POST-MORTEM

With the House of Representatives composition now known, though with the Senate still to be finally decided, this note is directed to an election *post-mortem*.

Consider first the 56 Liberal party room denizens who last September voted (or in two cases would have voted if present) to sack the Prime Minister who led them to a crushing victory only two years earlier – endowing the Coalition with an absolute majority of 30 and a 35-seat majority over Labor. Some 40 of these miscreants were members and 16 senators. Pre-election, seven of those members (including one of the key plotters group, Mal Brough) and two senators announced their retirements, and two (Bronwyn Bishop and Dennis Jensen) suffered the ultimate indignity of being defeated for pre-selection. Another six of those members have now been defeated (including two more key plotters, Peter Hendy and Wyatt Roy), and two senators (David Johnston, WA and Richard Colbeck, Tasmania) have also failed to be returned. Of the 56 original culprits, 37 therefore still remain in the Parliament. They have been joined there, regrettably, by some others of the same ilk, such as Jason Falinski, the new member for Mackellar (*vice* Bronwyn Bishop), who is even further Left than Malcolm Turnbull himself.

All 16 Coalition seats lost were lost by Liberals or, in Queensland, by Liberal National Party members who sat in the Liberal rather than the National party room. There were two Liberal gains: Fairfax, which reversed its Clive Palmer folly, and Chisholm, a genuine gain from Labor – a seat, no doubt coincidentally, never visited by Turnbull throughout the eight-week campaign! The National Party (including its Queensland LNP members) lost no seats, and actually gained one from the Liberals in Murray. While there was an overall swing against the Liberal Party of 3.35 per cent, the National Party recorded a small (0.32 per cent) swing towards it. So Rule 1 of the ‘Rules of

Engagement’ (*Speccie*, 14/05/16) – that is, vote National wherever possible because they had no hand in Turnbull’s coup – seems to have delivered. That view now seems to have become widely accepted. For example, the *Australian* (‘Voters buck tickets to pick senators’, 26/07/16) reported: ‘It is clear the Liberals have lost conservative votes to the Nationals...’, and that ‘the NSW count also shows conservative voters cherry-picked Nationals senators’. Queensland, too, ‘saw deliberate voting for LNP senators who are deemed Nationals in Canberra, over Liberals’. While these remarks relate only to the Senate vote, the House vote reveals the same behaviour pattern, as the figures above attest. Well done, all you Del-Cons who had ‘nowhere else to go’.

In 2013 the Coalition parties polled 53.49 per cent of all formal votes cast for the House on a two-party preferred basis; this time they polled only 49.86 per cent. That 3.63 percentage point drop in their vote meant that, after distribution of preferences, 490,000 votes were lost to Labor. Even more significantly, the Coalition parties on this occasion recorded a primary vote of only 42.04 per cent of all formal votes, 3.51 percentage points below Tony Abbott’s 2013 achievement and their third-lowest primary vote percentage in the post-War period. While Labor improved on the catastrophic 33.38 per cent recorded in 2013, its 34.73 per cent was still its second-lowest primary vote percentage in the post-War period. In 2013 Palmer United Party candidates racked up 709,035 primary votes in House of Representatives contests; this time the few PUP candidates standing received a derisory 316 votes. Their places were more than fully taken, however, by a gaggle of newcomers – the Nick Xenophon Team, Pauline Hanson One Nation Party, the Jacqui Lambie Party, Derryn Hinch’s Justice Party and so on – who between them seem likely to hold ten (possibly more) Senate seats. So Turnbull’s gamble to rid the previous Senate of its ‘ferals’ by calling a double dissolution seems to have spectacularly failed, with his own Coalition Senate team weakened and even more ‘ferals’ now to face than the eight there

previously. I have argued here earlier (‘After Turnbull, Who?’, 11/06/16) that even a House of Reps outcome rather better than the one now recorded would be grounds for the Liberal party room to demand Turnbull’s resignation. In the event, despite the even worse result, the survivors lacked the *cojones* to do what they will certainly have to do sometime down the track if they are to have any chance of winning the next election, whenever that is held.

To recapitulate, consider the pass to which, in just nine months, Turnbull has brought his party:

- A House situation where, after appointing a Speaker, he will have to govern with a single seat majority.
- A Senate situation even worse than before.
- A new Ministry, no less than 43 in number and already becoming a joke, while senior, highly experienced people (Abetz, Andrews, Abbott, Bernardi) adorn the back benches.
- A crippled government led by a supreme narcissist (see my piece on the *Speccie*’s excellent new Flat White blog at spectator.com.au) incapable of seeing, let alone admitting, his own central role in this disaster.
- And a continuing, even growing, band of ‘Dis-Cons’ (disaffected conservatives) who will never return to voting Liberal until Turnbull is sent packing.

Sooner or later, Turnbull will have to go. Those same ‘bed-wetters’ who decided that their only hope of keeping their jobs lay in sacking Abbott will inevitably come to the same conclusion in respect of Turnbull. In turn, that must mean that ‘twere well it were done quickly’ – a line that should resonate with the Liberals’ own Lady Macbeth (Julie Bishop). That is not to predict that, when that time comes, the party room will replace Turnbull with a now chastened Tony Abbott – best choice though he would undoubtedly be. It will simply be a case, as it was before in 2009, of ABM – Anyone But Malcolm. I look forward to it.