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## **DIS-CON NOTES**

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Decision time

## **SPECTATOR AUSTRALIA**

Recent events make it necessary for us Dis-Cons to ask where things now stand. Despite evermounting evidence against his leadership, Malcolm Turnbull remains Prime Minister. While what has to be done is obvious, nobody in the Liberal party room has yet done it.

I last wrote on these matters ('The Next Abbott Ministry (Part II)') on March 4. Between writing and publication, there appeared a February 27 Newspan. As I said next day in the Australian: 'Bad doesn't begin to describe the latest Newspan. ... All this after most people thought the Coalition had experienced its best couple of weeks in Parliament since the election.

What it all shows (again) is that Turnbull is unelectable: people have simply stopped listening to him'. So bad, indeed, was that poll that it had to be thought possibly a 'rogue', and that view strengthened when the next Newspan (March 18) improved, with the two-party preferred Coalition vote lifting from a catastrophic 45 per cent to a merely disastrous 48 per cent.

According to the Australian's assorted Turnbull boosters, he was 'clawing back' the Coalition's position. They spoke, predictably, too soon. The April 3 Newspan slipped again, with a Coalition 2PP vote of 47 per cent; and while the 48 per cent in last Monday's Newspan was headlined by the Australian as 'PM regains ground...', in fact the single most important marker (the Coalition primary vote) remained unchanged at a disastrous 36 per cent. Again, this came after a week when Turnbull (with an eye to the imminent Newspan) had announced two genuinely wellreceived policy changes on 457 visas and citizenship.

To repeat, 'people have simply stopped listening to him'.

Of course, as politicians always say, the only poll that counts occurs on election day; and certainly, as the Australian's former editor-in-chief, Chris Mitchell, has written, Tony Abbott would have won the 2016 election (and won it better) despite having trailed Labor for 30 successive Newspolls when Turnbull mounted his coup.

Incidentally, journalists often refer to that statistic and say that, although the Coalition under Turnbull has now trailed Labor for 11 successive Newspolls, that still falls well short of 30. They should however recall that when that spill motion was moved in the Liberal party room on February 7, 2015, 'the Newspan count' had then only registered 16 successive adverse results.

But I digress. The time has come for Liberal members and senators seriously to reflect on their political futures. As that earlier article noted, 'the inescapable reality is that, under Turnbull, the Coalition will lose the next election'. Since then there has, as noted above, been much further polling evidence; but even more telling has been the proof that 'Turnbull is simply no good at politics'.

Could there have been a clearer demonstration of that than his (and Julie Bishop's) staggeringly inept handling recently of the Chinese extradition treaty matter?

Greg Sheridan (The Weekend Australian, 1-2/04/17), in an utterly excoriating article, described it as 'this tawdry and unbelievably incompetent business', and also went on to nail, one by one, the shameful anti-Abbott canards circulated by the party's Leader and Deputy Leader as 'untrue or misleading'. Significantly for us Dis-Cons, the politician to emerge from this shambles with his honour and integrity not merely intact but even enhanced was Abbott.

Exactly that same outcome emerges from last week's firestorm ignited by Philip Coorey's Australian Financial Review article which, based on a leak that can only have come from Turnbull himself or from someone very close to him and acting on his authority, alleged that, but for Turnbull's personal intervention to support him, Abbott would have lost his seat last year.

The sheer political stupidity of this episode re-affirms Turnbull's poor judgment. Even more crucially, it shows that if both men remain in the Parliament, the Liberals will not merely lose the next election; they will be slaughtered. Abbott, however, has made it clear he is not going anywhere. If the Liberal Party is to survive, Turnbull must therefore leave the Parliament. There is no escaping that conclusion.

To turn, then, to our muttons, before the Budget session ends on June 22 we will have had another four Newspolls (thereby approaching that aforementioned 16 figure), all of which, I predict, will show Labor still in command. We will have had a Budget that, I also predict, will be not disastrous but a fizzer. The Liberal party room, too, will have had more than enough time to make up its irresolute mind. By mid-year, then, we Dis-Cons will know whether the Liberal party room has acted, or whether it has continued to fail at the fence. So consider those two possibilities.

If by mid-year the Liberals have a new Leader (and Deputy Leader, since Lady Macbeth must go too) from the party's Right, many Dis-Cons will stream back into the Liberal voting camp. That stream would become a flood were the new Leader to be Tony Abbott, but anyone from the Right (Peter Dutton?) will still move many Dis-Cons back to their former fealty.

If, per contra, nothing has been done by mid-year, we still loosely unattached Dis-Cons will need finally to make the break – to sever our former Liberal loyalties and definitively look elsewhere to lodge our votes. Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party, of course, beckons, as do the Liberal Democrats. Perhaps most attractive may be Cory Bernardi's Conservative Party; but one way or the other, decision time approaches.

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