

Dear All

Last night's 7.30 report had a piece headed "Tony Abbott escalates campaign against Malcolm Turnbull" but saying that "Senior Liberals have publicly swung behind Malcolm Turnbull in the wake of more stinging criticism from Tony Abbott. Cabinet ministers have rejected the former prime minister's claim that the Liberal Party has moved to the left under Mr Turnbull".

Tony Abbott escalates campaign against Malcolm Turnbull



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Reporter: Andrew Probyn

Senior Liberals have publicly swung behind Malcolm Turnbull in the wake of more stinging criticism from Tony Abbott. Cabinet ministers have rejected the former prime minister's claim that the Liberal Party has moved to the left under Mr Turnbull.

Transcript

LEIGH SALES, PRESENTER: You'd think after watching the Labor Party tear itself apart in office, the Liberal Party might have learnt something about how not to lose Government - apparently not. This week, the former Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, has blatantly escalated his campaign undermining the man who replaced him. But far from joining Mr Abbott, senior Liberals are publicly swinging behind Malcolm Turnbull and they're even expressing support for moderate MP Christopher Pyne. He made some indelicate remarks on the weekend that triggered this latest round of instability.

Not many people in the Liberal Party believe Tony Abbott is the answer to their poor standing in the opinion polls, but as political correspondent Andrew Probyn reports, they're nonetheless deeply concerned about the damage he can inflict on the Turnbull Government.

ANDREW PROBYN, REPORTER: The graveyard of ex-Prime Ministers torn down by their own, has filled rapidly in the past decade.

KEVIN RUDD, FORMER PRIME MINISTER: It is a high honour to be elected as Prime Minister of Australia, and to the people of Australia - I say thank you.

ANDREW PROBYN: Some have handled the humiliation better than others.

JULIA GILLARD, FORMER PRIME MINISTER: What I am absolutely confident of, is it will be easier for the next woman and the woman after that and the woman after that, and I'm proud of that.

ANDREW PROBYN: Others have turned their focus to destabilisation and revenge. As Opposition Leader, Tony Abbott was chief critic of the revolving door of Labor leaders.

TONY ABBOTT: In 2007, you voted for Kevin and got Julia. In 2010, you voted for Julia and got Kevin. If you vote for the Labor Party in 2013, who knows who you'll end up with.

ANDREW PROBYN: In 2013, we got Tony Abbott, but ended up with Malcolm Turnbull. And now the deposed, despite promising this.

TONY ABBOTT: There'll be no wrecking, no undermining, and no sniping.

ANDREW PROBYN: Is borrowing from Kevin Rudd's destructive manual.

TONY ABBOTT: But I can assure you, I'm in no hurry to leave public life because we need strong Liberal conservative voices now more than ever.

ANDREW PROBYN: And here we are again, a Government distracted by internal division, struggling to have its messages heard.

MALCOLM TURNBULL: Can I just say to you - this is a - this is a very - I want this to be very, very clear. I understand the media's fascination with personalities. But I'll tell you, the only personalities I'm interested in are 24 million Australians.

ANDREW PROBYN: The same disease that racked Labor in Government is now infecting the Liberals. Like the Rudd-Gillard clash, this is a fight-to-the-death battle between the incumbent and the vanquished. Even if Tony Abbott dresses it up as a contest about what the Liberal Party should stand for. And Christopher Pyne's triumphant speech to fellow moderates saying they're in ascendency in

Government has deeply annoyed conservatives, despite two prominent members of the right seeking to downplay it.

JOSH FRYDENBERG, ENERGY MINISTER: Christopher Pyne is doing a very effective role as Leader of the House and doing a very effective role in his portfolio.

CHRISTIAN PORTER: Christopher Pyne does an excellent job as a minister in my observation, he does a marvellous job as the Leader of the House.

ANDREW PROBYN: As revealed by 7.30 yesterday, some conservatives want Christopher Pyne dumped from the Government's leadership team, and replaced as chief tactician in the lower house by Peter Dutton.

They're also demanding greater representation in cabinet for the right and want junior ministers Michael Sukkar and Angus Taylor promoted.

MALCOLM TURNBULL: I have an outstanding ministry and all of my ministers have my support. I got a great team and we're delivering great results for the Australian people.

ANDREW PROBYN: A free-wheeling and freelancing Tony Abbott has used a series of public outings in recent days to criticise the Government's positions on everything, from energy to school funding, even suggesting Malcolm Turnbull didn't speak the language of voters. The PM today returned serve.

MALCOLM TURNBULL: I'm not into political slogans.

ANDREW PROBYN: As for Mr Abbott's suggestion the Government freeze the Renewable Energy Target.

MALCOLM TURNBULL: Let me remind you, that the renewable energy target was recently renegotiated and legislated in 2015 while Mr Abbott was Prime Minister.

ANDREW PROBYN: The PM's frustration at again being side-swiped by his predecessors shows.

MALCOLM TURNBULL: Australians are bored, fed-up with journalists and politicians talking among - about themselves. They're not interested in the personalities among politicians. They want to know what they're doing.

JOURNALIST: Mr Turnbull, this is not about personalities. Tony Abbott is outlining alternative policy prescriptions for your Government, including on Gonski, your victory last week. You need to counsel him.

MALCOLM TURNBULL: Well, thanks for the free advice, but the - but the - look, thank you for the free advice, Gonski 2.0 was passed by the House of Representatives and all members of the Coalition voted for it. So that's the position. It is now law.

ANDREW PROBYN: On radio today, Tony Abbott didn't deny reports he'd vow to stick around to clean-up after Malcolm Turnbull.

TONY ABBOTT: What I say, publicly and privately, is that I reckon I still have a contribution to make to public life. I think I have a role as a standard bearer for Liberal conservative values here and in the wider world.

ANDREW PROBYN: And emboldened Mr Abbott is getting some senior conservative colleagues off-side with his frequent interventions. The latest, cabinet Minister Christian Porter flatly rejects the assertion the Liberals have lurched left citing the tightening of citizenship rules.

CHRISTIAN PORTER: The idea that that represents a shift to the left just has no resemblance to the actual reality of the policy in question.

ANDREW PROBYN: Is it possible for the Liberal Party to make peace with itself? The Turnbull-Abbott relationship is certainly beyond repair. Their mutual hate is biblical in proportion, even if Christopher Pyne is demoted, it won't be enough for those intent on bringing the PM down. Sadly, we have seen this all before. Tony Abbott is slowly killing this Government, making Bill Shorten the luckiest man in politics.

BILL SHORTEN: Thank you very much. See you later.