

# DIS-CON NOTES

John Stone

## TOUGHEN UP, SNOWFLAKES

Another parliamentary sitting week has passed, with nothing done to confront the fate that has been staring the Liberal party, and hence the Coalition, in the face for many months. The only half-rational reason for this inertia may be that, with a Queensland election now said to be imminent, the Queensland LNP are pressing their Canberra Liberal colleagues not to rock the boat until that is behind them. Once it is, however, there should be no more shilly-shallying.

As Monday's Newspoll again underlined, the Coalition's desperate situation continues. Nearly four months ago I said ('Dis-Con Notes: 14 and Counting', 24/06/17) that even on the inadequate two-party-preferred (2PP) metric to which Malcolm Turnbull's denialist acolytes still cling, we had already almost reached the first 'challenge' benchmark – when, on February 7, 2015 two WA Liberals called a 'spill' after the Coalition registered its 16th successively adverse Newspoll. (As noted at the time, 'Turnbull had earlier betrayed another Liberal leader with a challenge after just 16 successive Newspoll losses, when he backstabbed Brendan Nelson in 2008'). Today, the 2PP 'Newspoll count' stands at 21.

This 2PP metric, however, is an inadequate indicator of the Coalition's plight. In the *Australian* on July 5 last ('Newspoll figures clearly say Malcolm's time is up') I set out two other, better ones. First, 'how long a party is substantially behind, on a sustained basis, in 2PP terms, where "substantially" means four or more percentage points'; and second, 'performance on primary votes rather than on a 2PP basis, with the primary vote giving a more meaningful indication of how depressed is the level of a party's core supporters'.

These distinctions are, after all, obvious enough. To take the first, it is one thing for a party to trail its opponents by, say, 49 to 51 on a

2PP basis; that two point 'gap' should be recoverable. It is a very different thing to be doing so, month after month, on a 48 to 52 ratio (or worse), with the gap doubling from two points to four (or more). As for the second, that too is obvious: when a party's primary vote falls markedly, it will have more and more difficulty raising finance and manning the polling booths on election day.

*As things stand, Turnbull is a dead man walking, politically speaking*

During Tony Abbott's much criticised prime ministership, the Coalition once experienced eight successive polls where, on a 2PP basis, it trailed Labor substantially (as defined). This followed the 2014-15 Budget, the only occasion when the Coalition has actually sought to address its deficit problem. Today, it is not merely that the Turnbull-led Coalition has fallen short of Labor on a 2PP basis for 21 successive Newspolls: the really dire indicator is that every one of those polls has recorded a substantial gap. More starkly still, the last eight polls have recorded gaps of six points or more. This is 'irrecoverable' territory.

Not surprisingly, the same verdict emerges from the primary vote record. In 2016, when the Coalition barely survived, it recorded a primary vote of 41.8 per cent. For the last 21 Newspolls it has been below 40 per cent; and more tellingly, for the last 15 it has been at a catastrophic 37 per cent or less.

This can't go on. Sometime before Parliament rises on December 7 for the Christmas-New Year recess, this (Turn)bull must be taken by the horns. It is not only the Liberal party's future that is now at stake. If Turnbull is allowed to lead his own party's lemmings over the next election precipice, they will drag the National party in their wake – both in terms of losing seats, and certainly (with Labor at the helm) in terms of losing influence. As NSW National Party leader John Barilaro said last week, 'I think the National party federally is being

dragged down by what's happening with the Liberal party. ... it's the constant leadership speculation... Federally, the Libs need to sort themselves out'. Precisely; and during the weeks ahead the Nats should be urging their Liberal colleagues to do so asap.

As to who should replace Turnbull, that is a matter for the Liberal party room, although clearly it can't be another leftie. In his recent London speech to the Global Warming Policy Foundation, Tony Abbott again demonstrated that he stands head and shoulders above any other member of the current Parliament, not only for his well-reasoned, comprehensive trashing of the global warming scam, but also for his framing of that quasi-religious phenomenon within the broader perspective of the world-wide attack on Western civilisation. The qualities he now offers of hard political lessons learned and his past proven capacity to capture (or in today's case, hold) seats, should make him the leading candidate. But that said, my primary focus here is not on restoring Abbott to the leadership, but of ensuring Labor is defeated in 2019. If, in the party room's judgment, that means a new leader, from the party's right, who can also bring Abbott's talents back to the front bench in an appropriately senior position, so be it.

To repeat: we simply cannot risk a Labor government. So now is the time for all good men (these days, read persons) to come to the aid not only of the party, but the country. As things stand, it is not merely that Turnbull is a dead man walking (politically speaking), but also that anywhere between 10 and 20 of those now walking with him are destined for the same fate.

The message to the Liberal party room can therefore be best framed in some of the last words of the late, great Bill Leak: 'Toughen up, snowflakes', and do what has to be done.