

Terry McCrann: Why Malcolm Turnbull and Steve Smith are both clueless leaders

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IS Steve Smith the Malcolm Turnbull of sport or Malcolm Turnbull the Steve Smith of politics?

No, no, I'm not referring to the cheating — by Smith, of course; but the utter cluelessness they share.

COALITION GOVERNMENT LOSES ITS 29TH STRAIGHT NEWSPOLL

'WHAT IS THE POINT OF MALCOLM TURNBULL?'

Which led, in the case of Smith, to him getting up on that now iconic “next day” believing life, and especially his as captain, could go on seamlessly and unchanged as before.

And which will lead, in the case of Turnbull, to him expecting exactly the same thing — that he can continue seamlessly and unchallenged as “captain of Australia” — when the 30th successive negative Newspoll ticks over next month.

The first words out of Smith's mouth at that now infamous press conference should have been: I am tendering my resignation as captain of the Australian cricket team.



Is Steve Smith the Malcolm Turnbull of sport or Malcolm Turnbull the Steve Smith of politics? Picture: AAP/Mick Tsikas

That would have been followed by an extended, unqualified and unlimited apology to his teammates, who he had failed to lead except down the toilet; to everyone who has previously worn the Baggy Green, who he had betrayed; to cricket and cricketers more generally and to all Australians.

Although I'm reluctant to "go the Hitler comparison", in terms of what Smith *did* say, we haven't seen such cluelessness since that last week of April 1945 when Adolf was "bunkered down" planning the forthcoming 12th anniversary celebrations of his "Thousand-Year Reich".

Maybe we will see something of a cluelessness replay in a couple of weeks. I doubt the first words out of the Prime Minister's mouth on that relevant morning will include the words "resign" or "resignation".

Oh, they should, they should. Despite the best efforts of the media "note-takers" in the Canberra Press Gallery and other places — who have been

diligently pushing the “Turnbull line” of a broader context — there is no way, no way Turnbull can “survive” a 30th negative Newspoll.



Australian Test captain Steve Smith needs a reality check.

Yes, he can stay as PM. Until the next election. At which point he will be turfed out — along with at least a cricket team of his front and back benchers — on the basis not simplistically of negative Newspolls but the underlying, fundamental and far more pervasive Turnbull cluelessness.

In the same way Smith just “did not get it”, neither does Turnbull. He’s demonstrated that time and time again; most recently, in his utter failure to nail Bill Shorten’s hide to his “bash-the-pensioner” dividend refund move.

I’ve noted how Turnbull is our number one “Trump disbeliever”: the refusal to understand that Trump is *not* a President Hillary with a comb-over.

He announced that to the world the day after Trump won, by formally committing Australia to the Fake Paris Climate Accord, designed to not fight Fake Global Warming.

But he's also displayed it, continually and more generally, in his failure to replicate the technique that won it for Trump — and indeed, did the same for his predecessor, Tony Abbott.

Trump the candidate would get up on Monday and start the day by announcing he was going to “build the wall”. He would repeat it 50 times over the course of the day. He would do exactly the same thing on Tuesday and again on Wednesday. And every day to the election, including weekends.

Abbott's version was alternating between “I'll stop the boats” and “I'll axe the tax”. Now, it's only partly because Turnbull would not stoop to replay the Abbott style; it's more I would suggest, because he thinks and acts like the lawyer he was rather than the pollie he's chosen to become.



Former prime minister Tony Abbott launches Senator Pauline Hanson's book. Picture Kym Smith

At best, he says something once; then moves to gay and witty banter. Sometimes he doesn't even bother to say it once. More often he'll just muse about a range of alternatives, before drifting into his gay and witty banter.

Now, he did have one chance to arouse himself from his dozing cluelessness: by bringing Abbott back into the tent.

That would have had Abbott, at a minimum, micturating out rather than into, in a slightly different formulation of Lyndon B Johnson's famous advice.

But far more proactively, a PM Turnbull needs Abbott inside the tent to do what he has set about doing freelance — wooing Pauline Hanson, by agreeing to launch her book this week.

Let me spell it out to PM Clueless: there is no way, no way, that the Coalition can win the next election unless they get Hanson's preferences in Queensland.

There's a lot of nonsense that's been written about the "failure" and the "decline" of Hanson (and similarly, of Nick Xenophon) — much of it, absorbed by the duo.

The fact remains they are the two strongest individual political brands in Australia; and the one that matters to the Coalition is Hanson in Queensland. That cricket team — a dozen seats — are in her gift.

As Abbott at least understands, she — and the voters behind her — has to be wooed now, not reluctantly with a held prime ministerial nose only in the campaign.

A PM Clueless is not going to try. A PM Abbott would at least start the journey.

JOE THE SOCK PUPPET

ONE of the sharpest and on occasions telling gossip columnists in recent times has been the Fin Review's Joe Aston.

His sustained and successful evisceration of former CPA big-noter Alex Malley is something of a modern classic of substantive vituperation.

On the other hand, although it has delivered some juicy prime ministerial-bestowed scoops, Aston's tendency to act as Malcolm Turnbull's media sock puppet — happily retailing the "house line" — has not been a good look.

Aston would do better "losing the sock". At best, he's got about a year more: after the next election Aston's going to need "another hand", so to speak.