

'If Peter was the answer, what was the question?': Turnbull's spray at Dutton



Sunday Age, [Michael Koziol](#), 17 November 2018 — 10:28am

Late on Friday evening, in the cavernous space that is the Cutaway at Barangaroo, Malcolm Turnbull was hitting sixes to a home crowd. Barristers and legal eagles from around the country were in town for the Australian Bar Association's national conference, and the former prime minister - and former lawyer - was their guest of honour at the glamorous gala dinner.

Media had been denied access to the event - at Mr Turnbull's request - and attendees agreed to the "Chatham House rule" where information can be reported but the source can not be identified. But events in the Cutaway are easily audible and visible from above the venue, on Merriman Street, through the large gaps in the roof that give the space its airy feel.

"If Peter was the answer, you'd have to ask: what was the question?"Credit:Fairfax Media

Asked whether in retrospect he had assembled the best talent on his frontbench, given how many ministers voted to knife him in August, Mr Turnbull began diplomatically, insisting that although he "appreciate[d] the sympathy", he was made of "sterner stuff than that". "I'm a live-by-the-sword, die-by-the-sword type of person," he said.

Mr Turnbull continued his line of attack, first offered on the ABC's Q&A, that those responsible for the coup against Australia's 29th prime minister [had failed to adequately explain themselves](#). "The insurgents are unable to provide any coherent explanation or any rational explanation," he lamented. "People have got to take responsibility for their own actions ... the individual MP or senator is responsible for his or her actions."

In his first appearance since being ousted as leader, Malcolm Turnbull names the people who plotted his demise, outlines a conversation with Rupert Murdoch and calls out a culture of bullying in the Liberal party.

Mr Turnbull told the adoring crowd the consequences of his removal - the government's collapse in the polls - were "both predicted and predictable". They were also "terrible for the government and terrible for the country, and for the Liberal Party".

But Mr Turnbull reserved his harshest remarks for the man blamed for instigating his demise - Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton, who scored 35 votes against Mr Turnbull in the [first leadership ballot](#), in what turned out to be a fatal blow. "If Peter was the answer, you'd have to ask: what was the question?" Mr Turnbull said to roars of laughter and applause. He later added: "I'm not a hater, I'm a positive person."

The Australian Bar Association's gala dinner was audible and visible from Barangaroo. Credit: Michael Koziol

Shortly thereafter, Fairfax Media was accosted by security guards associated with the Barangaroo Development Authority, an agency of the NSW government, as well as a woman identifying herself as the event manager. The officials attempted to stop Fairfax Media recording audio or taking notes. "You're not allowed to do that, you need to shut that off," one security guard said, despite being told it was a public place in which taking notes was legal.

['He wouldn't be grateful if we did': Liberals hit out at Malcolm Turnbull's demands to explain the coup](#) A male security guard manhandled and physically restrained this reporter, and called for the police. Then another guard and the event manager used their phones to blast music in this reporter's ears so that Mr Turnbull was no longer audible.

Later, Fairfax Media went to another publicly-accessible area from where the Cutaway is audible. Mr Turnbull was heard to lament the Coalition was presently "not capable" of dealing with climate change as an issue, despite it being "a profound problem".

He described the climate-sceptic constituency within the party as a "third rail", a group who were "on another plane" and not able to "play ball" with the mainstream.

Mr Turnbull said he would continue to express his views on issues such as climate, energy and foreign relations. But he said: "The one thing I'm not doing

is hanging around the Parliament seeking to overthrow the government of my successor."

The former PM also described [Britain's decision to exit the European Union](#) as a "catastrophe", and a decision that was "not even understood by the government, let alone by the people". "It was absolutely uninformed consent," he said of the Brexit vote.

Mr Turnbull was effusive in his praise for his former deputy, Julie Bishop, whom he described as an "outstanding leader" and Australia's "finest foreign minister", whose departure from that role was "a huge loss" for the country. He also reflected on the lack of respect for women in politics. "Standards, attitudes in Parliament remind me of the attitudes of the 1980s," he said.

Michael Koziol is the immigration and legal affairs reporter for the Sydney Morning Herald and The Age, based in Parliament House