

Incompetent, spiteful: Peter Dutton unleashes on Malcolm Turnbull

Renee Viellaris, The Sunday Mail (Qld), December 30, 2018 1:00am

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PETER Dutton has spectacularly broken his silence to accuse Malcolm Turnbull of spite attacks worse than Kevin Rudd's, and lambasted the former prime minister for running a "paralysed" government caused by his own political incompetence.

In an explosive, gloves-off account to The Sunday Mail, the senior Federal Government frontbencher reveals why his colleagues pushed to dump an indecisive Mr Turnbull in August. Mr Dutton, who has spoken out to protect his colleagues and the Government from ongoing criticism, has accused Mr Turnbull of a political hissy-fit worse than the backstabbing Mr Rudd unleashed on Julia Gillard after she rolled him in 2010.

He said Mr Turnbull did "not have a political bone in his body", took the Government's message from three-word slogans to "3000", and alienated rusted-on Liberal Party supporters. Mr Dutton predicted the Coalition would have lost 25 seats if Mr Turnbull remained prime minister.



Then prime minister Malcolm Turnbull with Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton

Mr Turnbull has regularly denied wrongdoing, but has privately briefed some MPs on what he was planning as prime minister, reaffirming the views by some that he is trying to destabilise and kill off the Government.

In one of the must-read political exposes of 2018, Mr Dutton, who says he is “no Bible basher or right-wing extremist”, said he and other senior Ministers for a long-time sandbagged Mr Turnbull’s leadership, but the biggest damage to Mr Turnbull’s legacy — and his prime ministership — was self-inflicted. “I am the first to defend the legacy of the Turnbull government. Malcolm was strong on economic management, borders and national security, but Malcolm will trash his own legacy if he believes his position is strengthened by seeing us lose under Scott,” Mr Dutton said.

“Walking away from (his seat of) Wentworth and not working to have (Liberal Wentworth candidate) Dave Sharma elected was worse than any behaviour we saw even under Rudd. “In 2016, Malcolm ran the worst campaign in Liberal Party history, and we ended up losing 15 seats and were left with a one-seat majority which just made the Parliament unmanageable. We were paralysed.

“Countless opportunities to strengthen the Government or nail Shorten passed us by because Malcolm couldn’t make a decision.

“Malcolm is charming and affable but he doesn’t have a political bone in his body and it’s not a criticism, but without political judgment you can’t survive in politics and he didn’t. “Malcolm had a plan to become Prime Minister but no plan to be Prime Minister. “He didn’t have John Howard’s touch or judgment nor his ability to convey a message. We went from three-word slogans under Tony (Abbott) to 3000 under Malcolm and our achievements weren’t effectively communicated as a result.”



Peter Dutton takes a break on the Gold Coast with wife Kirilly, daughter Rebecca and sons Harry and Tom. Picture: Nigel Hallett

ON THE SPILL

Malcolm said to me on two occasions, ‘This Government only survives because of Scott, Mathias, you and I’. “The reality is along with a number of senior colleagues we all did everything possible to make the Turnbull government work — we did not leak or undermine and we backed him up at every turn, but there was only so much we could do.

“The Liberal Party had become unrecognisable to our supporters. People who had voted for us for years had switched off. “Energy policy had effectively become the “greatest moral challenge of our time” and version after version just didn’t work. “Marginal seat members across the country believed we would lose the election and in the end MP’s couldn’t walk down the street without people saying you have to get rid of him. “People thought they had a good local member but wouldn’t vote for us whilst Malcolm was leader.

“It became clear after we had lost 38 Newpoll’s in a row the government was going to be wiped out under Malcolm and that was the view of many based on discussions with their constituents. “I have no doubt Malcolm will rue the day he stormed in to the party room and declared the leadership open expecting to get a resounding vote. “His low vote destroyed him without any challenge necessary. It was then only a matter of when, and he used every trick to delay the vote but it would have been untenable to leave Canberra that week without the leadership question being settled.

ON HIS FAILED LEADERSHIP TILT

Mr Dutton said it was easy to get behind Mr Morrison because it was for the good of the country to have a leader able to defeat Labor. “I challenged Malcolm for a number of reasons - one was Bill Shorten was certain to be PM if Malcolm was still in his job, so I declared my support for Scott from day one because he is a better person than Bill Shorten.

“(Scott) is a good economic manager and strong on border protection and national security.”



Peter Dutton has also weighed in on another former prime minister, Tony Abbott.

ON HOLDING HIS SEAT

Mr Dutton, who is holidaying at the Gold Coast with wife Kirilly and children Rebecca, Harry and Tom, said he knew he would have a tough fight on his hands to retain his marginal seat of Dickson north of Brisbane. He said while most voters in Australia viewed him through the prism of his decisions on border security, in his electorate, he hoped it was different in his outer suburban electorate.

“Dickson has always been a marginal seat and it’s a battle every election. But our family live locally and have done for a long time and I think people appreciate that.”

ON TONY ABBOTT

“After the 2013 election Tony broke his promise not to cut spending in certain areas and made some bad decisions otherwise. “It left him vulnerable and three or four members of his cabinet leaked continuously and undermined which ultimately destroyed the Abbott Government. “The suggestion I was acting under Tony’s direction is another fairytale. I had been clear with Tony

very early on I would not be his stalking horse, and I didn't seek his advice and nor did he offer it during the leadership week. Malcolm was the beneficiary."

ON SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

"Malcolm will understandably claim same-sex marriage as a great legacy of his Government, but the fact is the issue was going to destroy his government.

"Rushing to a parliamentary vote would have destroyed his leadership overnight. "In the end Mathias and I worked with colleagues on the postal plebiscite. It gave a significant social change greater legitimacy because the public overwhelmingly supported it as opposed to driving it through parliament during a midnight sitting and winning by a vote or two.

"Without that Malcolm would never have survived that issue and he knew it."

ON CLAIMS HE IS A RIGHT-WING EXTREMIST

"I am not a Bible-basher or some right-wing extremist, but that suits how the Left want to define me. "The real reason they hate me is because of border protection policy, and I have taken a tough stance on the issue but it has kept us safe. "The claims the party was dragged to the Right was a nonsense.

"We ran a tight budget management process, we secured borders and kept our country safe and didn't adopt an energy policy that would destroy jobs and the economy. "To me that sounds more common sense than right-wing-extremist."

Originally published as 'Worse than Rudd': Dutton unleashes on Turnbull