

The coming conservative revolt

By Merv Bendle, Quadrant Online, 1 February 2016

If Liberals persist in endorsing the moral, cultural, and political nihilism of their current leader nothing is more certain than the emergence of an ardent movement intent on restoring the primacy of principle. Don't believe your media courtiers, Mr Turnbull. The storm is gathering.

Conservatism is in crisis

Conservatism is in crisis. That is the conclusion drawn by leading commentators, reflecting upon the Turnbull coup in Australia, the electoral defeat of Stephen Harper in Canada, and the ongoing success of David Cameron, seen as Tory centrist. But are they right? Or are they suffering from the premature articulation of progressivist triumphalism?

According to Paul Kelly in *The Australian* ([paywalled](#)), writing in the afterglow of the coup, there is a powerful global trend against traditional conservative values “and Australia is a frontline test case”. Leading this alleged trend is Malcolm Turnbull, “a social progressive who champions same-sex marriage, serious action on climate change, a multicultural society, a repudiation of the monarchical trappings, and an economy, entrepreneurial and innovative, geared to aspiration.”

Kelly claims that this collection of trendy issues constitutes an alternative political platform “to that adopted by any previous Liberal Prime Minister”. It is, by his reckoning, a synthesis of “economic adaptability with social progressivity [sic], not the social conservatism of Howard and Abbott”, and Turnbull’s task, again according to Kelly, is to hold the conservative forces of the Liberal Party together while he remakes it in his own progressivist image.

This leftward shift

While this leftward shift within the Liberal Party might lead to the disaffection of the party’s traditional conservatives at the grassroots level the line is that they have nowhere to go. Moreover, their loss will be compensated by Turnbull’s “appeal to feminists, gays, environmentalists, ethnics and youths”. Apparently these latter groups will now enthusiastically join Liberal Party branches, engage in fund-raising, and stand around on election days giving out how-to-vote cards for the newly-transformed, “progressivist” Liberal Party.

On the other hand, this progressivist shift within the party might be quite traumatic, meaning Turnbull’s major challenge will be to retain the traditional conservative base before it “fragments and badly damages his government, a process that occurred, in varying ways, in

Britain and the US.” Here Kelly invokes David Cameron as one of the “symbols of [the] new brand of conservative party leader” he believes Turnbull to be — men who “govern in their own right and have inflicted crushing defeats on the main oppositions”. Moreover, while “Cameron struggled to hold support from conservative MPs and limit damage from the right-wing populist UK Independence Party”, he ultimately prevailed, in Kelly’s view.

Presently in Australia, “the conservative movement within the Liberal Party is at a crossroads” and must redefine itself, according to Peter van Onselen, writing today (January 30) in the *Weekend Australian* beneath the headline “Mod cons with little room to move”. Standing in the middle of this intersection is Tony Abbott, whom van Onselen portrays as the principal obstacle on the path to a constructive transformation of Australian conservatism. Despite Abbott’s post-coup attempts to remake himself as an ideological leader of Anglosphere conservatism, van Onselen dismisses him as a fake who betrayed conservatives on the iconic issue of free speech when he reneged on his promise to remove the draconian restrictions imposed on free speech by Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act. Abbott, according to van Onselen, is merely one of the “reactionaries on the right” threatening to hijack modern conservatism.

This apparently will be led by “up and coming conservatives” like Angus Taylor (which may explain the desperate attempts by the progressivist NSW Liberal Party machine to dis-endorse him), Senator Zed Seselja, or new MP Andrew Hastie. In the interim, “Peter Dutton and Josh Frydenberg jostle for position at the top of the conservative tree”. All these politicians are “seeking to break free from the Abbott era”, and the one thing they need is for Abbott to go away (along with Kevin Andrews, Eric Abetz, and other “ageing veterans”).

Analysis based on the false premise

The problem with this type of analysis is that it is based on the false premise that conservatism is globally in retreat and needs to adorn itself in progressivist attire. It certainly is the case that progressivism enjoys a stranglehold on key elites in Canada and Australia – a stranglehold Turnbull exploited to engineer his coup. It is also very influential in the US, UK, and EU. Nevertheless, progressivism is itself now in retreat under the impact of widespread (and long overdue) reactions to two interlocked phenomena. Firstly, to the stifling ideological domination of political correctness – a response epitomized by the rise of Donald Trump – and, secondly, to the increasingly existential threat of Islamism and the Muslim insurgency, especially in Europe.

The terminal weakness of progressivism is presently being revealed: it is little more than state-empowered libertinism, iconoclasm, and antinomianism, financed by mortgaging the future and culminating in civilizational suicide. Its impotence in the face of a mortal demographic, social and ideological threat is presently being demonstrated as Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and France scramble to put the jihadist genie back in the Middle-Eastern

bottle. All across Europe, parties of the right and the far-right are enjoying massive increases in support as Europeans realize what their sermonising betters have done. Support that will only grow as the Continent sinks into the quagmire of its own making.

Hopefully Australia will avoid this catastrophe

Australia (it can be hoped) will avoid this catastrophe precisely because of the pre-eminently conservative steps taken by the Abbott government to ‘stop the boats’ and largely curtail the tsunami of illegal immigration promoted by the Rudd-Gillard regimes. Ironically, as Europe wallows in the progressivist crapulence that Rudd, Gillard (and now Turnbull) longed to plunge Australia into, there is increasingly widespread recognition of the vital role Abbott (and Scott Morrison as Immigration minister) played in helping Australia avoid this fate – a recognition that is helping Abbott polish up his new conservative persona.

Avoid the siren call of influential and articulate commentators

The challenge for Australian conservatives in this context is to avoid the siren call of influential and articulate commentators, like van Onselen and Kelly, and not capitulate to the moral, cultural, and political nihilism represented by the ‘moderates’ in the Liberal Party. If the latter do prevail and there is a stampede to the progressivist left, then there will inevitably appear a significant new political force on the conservative side of politics. Such a development is presently heralded by the formation of the Australian Liberty Alliance by disaffected political activists appalled by the free rein given to Islamism in Australia and exasperated by the progressivist interdiction of the freedom of expression required to intelligently address such vital issues.

Ultimately, history will reveal that it is not conservatism but progressivism that is in crisis. What this nation needs are politicians able to comprehend the ominous trajectory of global events and articulate a conservative response for the Australian people.