

Federal election 2016: Voters doubly disillusioned

By Maurice Newman, The Australian, 23 March 2015

If you read the letters to the editor, online commentary and listen to talkback radio, it is becoming clearer by the day that the 54 parliamentary members of the Liberal Party who voted to replace Tony Abbott with Malcolm Turnbull were seriously misguided. Even if a large discount is applied to words and who said what where, when it comes to the next election it seems an army of baseball bats will be waiting for Liberal candidates.

This makes a double-dissolution election, involving a long 15-week campaign, a riskier proposition. Moreover, despite so-called reforms, the likelihood of more independent senators cannot be ruled out, adding to the challenges of an incoming government.

The Abbott coup

The Abbott coup was always a risky adventure, especially as there appears to have been no preparation for office in the event of success. Like the attempted spill in February last year, it was plotted in a vacuum with personal ambition sweeping aside other considerations, especially the wishes of voters. By executing the coup on the Monday in the knowledge the Canning by-election the following Saturday would result in a clear win for Liberal candidate Andrew Hastie, the plotters cynically avoided the public's verdict on the Abbott government in the one poll that counted.

Of course, to the winners go the spoils. Mercenary leadership rewards unscrupulous behaviour. In an inward-facing, "greed is good" culture, conspirators are promoted, others are unceremoniously hung out to dry. Without extraordinary leadership, such workplaces tend to fracture across time. Turnbull's business record suggests he is not that leader. He is more transactional than relationship. But he talks the talk of today's hip intelligentsia and is the essence of the Left's ideal of what a modern conservative prime minister should be.

Abbott is the antithesis, which is why the combined might of the progressive establishment was arranged against him. These are the same forces now determined to do whatever it takes to derail Donald Trump's march to the White House.

Left-wing elites hyped Turnbull

To overthrow Abbott, left-wing elites hyped Turnbull as the acceptable Liberal. With collaboration from within, they sealed Abbott's fate. Now, just six months in, their candidate isn't living up to expectations.

Not everyone shares his excitement at being an agile Australian. And, having patiently waited for the table with everything on it to be cleared in the hope a few crumbs may fall our way, we have learned the wait was fruitless. Worse, Turnbull's reason for change, a new era of slogan-free, coherent economic leadership, already has failed the truth in advertising test.

Samuel Huntington defines the American creed as that crucial differentiator that accounts for America's historic exceptionalism. While Australians may have lacked the same deep conviction, our extraordinary prosperity is also built on that creed. It embraces equality before the law, equality of opportunity, freedom of speech and association, self-reliance, limited government, free-market economics, and decentralised and devolved public authority. During

the past 50 years here, as in America, that creed has been subverted and declared outdated by the Left.

A soft liberal position

Public servants, judges, military chiefs, church leaders, teachers, academics, journalists, union bosses and even captains of industry have progressively adopted a soft liberal position and provided momentum for more rapid social change.

Political scientist Joseph Overton likens this process to an imaginary window within which exists a range of mainstream and uncontroversial views. Outside the Overton window lie shocking, upsetting and dangerously radical ideas. Across time, social pressure shifts the window and today's revolutionaries become tomorrow's moderates. The Left's conditioning has been so complete that today we mostly fear radicals on the Right.

Karl Marx predicted that if you "remove one freedom per generation ... soon you will have no freedom and no one would have noticed". During the Cold War, the Left promoted the Soviet Union's constitution as the most democratic in the world. Freedom of speech and assembly were guaranteed. Printing presses and other requisites were placed at the disposal of the workers. The only restriction was that the views expressed had to conform to the interests of working people as judged by the party leadership.

Is this Australia's future?

Daily we observe governments criminalising all sorts of human behaviour "in the national interest". We now have the Left's Safe Schools program, where young students are used as a weapon to discredit longstanding religious and cultural norms. With Europe as the model, the next step will be to subordinate the parent's role by giving the state primary responsibility for children.

Section 18c of the Racial Discrimination Act and the NSW Anti-Protest Bill are emblematic of the disdain governments have for once cherished freedoms. Indeed, today's Australia tolerates limited equality before the law, vanishing free speech, diminishing self-reliance and little application of free-market economics. Some public authority may have devolved to local government but don't pass go without permission.

Reversing an accelerating trend will be extremely hard. Abbott couldn't do it and now we watch Trump's campaign to restore many of the values that made America great being ruthlessly attacked by the controlling elites. Where classical liberalism advocates civil liberties and political freedom under the rule of law, socialism consolidates the government's master-servant power over the people, using force against the unwilling. After 50 years the people are noticing this role reversal. They feel powerless. The major parties are philosophically aligned. Voters can choose between Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

The Liberal Party may argue it's still a broad church, but it preaches a narrowing set of beliefs. At heart it has lost faith in the core values that made it and Australia great.

Allowing Turnbull to paint the church a deeper shade of socialist grey will encourage a growing number of disillusioned followers to search for a new religion.