

OPINION

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THE HARD RIGHT IS TOO SPLIT TO SPLIT



JOHN ADAMS

Despite the current euphoria, the success of Australian conservatism as a distinctive political force will be limited by its own lack of intellectual and policy depth.

Conservatives across Australia are buoyed by the federal election outcome, which saw a record high Senate micro party vote of more than 25 per cent resulting in the re-emergence of Pauline Hanson and a rejection of the established political order.

The significant block of disaffected conservative and libertarian voters, particularly in Queensland, NSW, Western Australia and Tasmania, demonstrates the right-of-centre micro party vote is sufficient to regularly elect a conservative senator in a future half-Senate election if the non-establishment conservative and libertarian vote is able to consolidate.

As a result, serious chatter within conservative circles regarding the creation of a new major conservative party has emerged and has gained currency with the launch by Senator Cory Bernardi of the Australian Conservatives movement.

Independent conservative commentators have started

to prepare the ground for the launch of such a party through floating the concept on talk shows and newspaper columns as well as providing an ongoing critique of Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's ineffectiveness and progressive values.

The launch of any new conservative party, however, faces significant philosophical and structural challenges.

Philosophically, conservatism throughout Australian history has been both reactionary and obstructionist to the ideological and policy innovations pushed by progressives and enacted by Labor and the Greens.

It continues to yearn for Australian society to return to a 19th-century traditionalist Anglophile view of sovereign nationalism, manifest faith, traditional heterosexual marriage, industrious free enterprise and the Protestant work ethic.

Structurally, disaffected conservatives and liberals remain fractured and disorganised, with competing egos and warring chieftains preventing political unification and electoral consolidation.

A concerted effort to consolidate the right-of-centre micro party vote will require persuasive negotiation as well as a flexible and agile application of realpolitik.

In a democratic system, voters typically cast their ballot by either voting for or against a candidate or a policy issue or set of issues.

For an Australian conservative party to be politically sustainable and successful in the medium term, it must project a forward-looking philosophical conserva-

tive ethos that will entice Australians to vote for conservatism rather than voting against Labor and the Greens. It must be supported by a holistic policy framework, using rational logic and empirical evidence rather than nostalgia.

Such a party must also offer a pragmatic, but distinctive, policy program that resolves Australia's multitude of policy challenges such as the cost of living, record household debt, employment security, soaring public sector debt and deficit, the war on drugs, declining school academic performance, falling multi-factor productivity and the obesity epidemic.

Unfortunately, the reliance by Australian conservatives on the intellectual contributions made by like-minded conservative allies in the UK, Europe and the US, and the lack of serious policy development, demonstrate that Australian conservatism is intellectually deficient to make a new political force successful. Never-

theless, the launch of a new conservative party, particularly while Malcolm Turnbull is PM, will achieve short-term political success as conservatives seek to flock to a political force that will rein in what they perceive to be the excesses of the current progressive agenda.

Free speech re-

strictions, gay marriage, the Safe Schools Program, multiculturalism, Islam, affirmative action, indigenous recognition, welfare dependency and refugees will be targets of immediate focus.

However, if conservatives are unable to positively distinguish themselves from the Liberal-National Coalition, both philosophically and practically on bread and butter issues such as the economy, national security, health and education, then its viability as a major political force may be short-lived.

John Adams is a former Coalition adviser.



Senator Cory Bernardi, who recently launched the Australian Conservatives movement.

THEY SAID IT

"We have witnessed too many atrocities in the name of terrorism. Last week's attack on men, women and children in Nice left me in utter disbelief. I saw the image of a baby covered in a plastic sheet with a doll lying beside her. The thought that it could happen here terrifies me." TV presenter Sonia Kruger following criticism of her call to end Muslim immigration.

"She has put herself out there. I commend her for it. She's speaking because she's a mother and she's worried about the future of her child, and future generations." Kruger wins support from newly-elected One Nation senator Pauline Hanson.

"That is not going to change." Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull says Australia's non-discriminatory immigration policy is here to stay.

"We need to face the future with confidence but it's easier to be confident when you know the challenge you face, and dealing with radical Islam is one of the great existential challenges of our time. In my view it's very hard to reconcile what's in the Koran with a modern, secular, pluralist democracy." Former PM Tony Abbott.

"It is quite probable that this was an Islamist attack." A German ministry spokesman after a 17-year-old Afghan refugee attacked train passengers with an axe before he was shot dead by police.

"I am very confident that I will be able to work with our leader Bill Shorten to have a role that makes a maximum contribution to our chances of being elected next time around." Labor's Tanya Plibersek (pictured) sparks speculation she will move to a higher-profile shadow ministry position.



Geoff Munro is national policy manager at the Alcohol and Drug Foundation.

DRUGS IN SPORT — WE'RE ALL TO BLAME



GEOFF MUNRO

It seems not a day goes past without a headline detailing the latest sporting hero's fall from grace due to illegal drugs. We need to stop pointing the finger and start asking ourselves some questions.

In this past week there have been separate allegations, all involving cocaine, made against players from the Swans, Eels and Broncos.

Meanwhile, two of South Australia's most respected suburban football coaches are now demanding an education program to deal with a "massive" and "growing illegal drug culture". We are all responsible.

If we know that men in their 20s are most at risk of misusing illicit drugs then what are we doing to protect them? We also know every athlete's journey begins at a community sports club, so what are we doing to make sure their training ground instils the right attitudes?

To properly address the problem, we have to go back to our grassroots community sporting clubs and interrogate the cultural attitudes we're embedding. What are the club expectations around alcohol? How are we managing illicit drugs? Do we have an

illicit drugs policy in place? The elite players get the bad publicity but we're ignoring their training ground.

But it isn't just the clubs who can play a role here. When you're enrolling your child, are you asking yourself, does this club reflect the values I want my child to grow up with? We have to take responsibility. All of us.

The good news is there are already several associations proactively doing work in this area. Through our Good Sports Program, the Southern Football Netball League and Essendon District Football League in Victoria have been running free forums for their clubs to help them develop and implement a drug policy that is suited for their specific environments. Not one size fits all.

Clubs need permission from the community to address this issue

openly, rather than hiding it behind closed doors.

We have had numerous clubs come to us, voicing concerns about recreational drug taking at their social events, coaches allegedly dealing or a player displaying mood swings.

Community sporting clubs are crying out for help and we should give it to them. They deserve it, our kids deserve it and our athletes deserve it. The buck stops with all of us. We need more support for community clubs and more funding to roll out programs.

If a fish is sick, we don't treat the fish, we treat the water. We have to take the same approach in dealing with illegal drugs in sport.

