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# ROUGH KNIGHT



**TIM GLEASON**

**W**hen I watched Malcolm Turnbull's speech on Sunday morning I thought of one thing: Monty Python. At that stage nobody had been willing to make a prediction that the Coalition had been returned to government in their own right. Facing a similar situation on election night in 2010, the then prime minister Julia Gillard opened her speech quoting Bill Clinton, saying: "The people have spoken, but it's going to take a little while to determine what they've said." Then there was the Prime Minister's speech. It was perfect — if he were giving it behind closed doors to a gang of Coalition staffers at campaign headquarters who had worked their butts off for three months. But it was horrific delivered live and uncut to the nation. After keeping the crowd waiting for more than six hours, the Prime Minister boldly claimed victory. Then he let rip. What should have been a speech to all Australians

about moving forward and working together became a mix of anger, excuses and frustration.

For starters, the PM mentioned the Australian Building and Construction Commission. Why now? Nobody had mentioned it the entire campaign.

Then he went thermo-nuclear on the so-called Medi-scare campaign.

Turnbull described it as "a lying campaign from the Labor Party ... an extraordinary act of dishonesty" and said "no doubt the police will investigate".

Remember this was just three minutes after he stunned everybody by claiming victory. Where was the joy?

As Laurie Oakes put it: "It is the first time that I have seen a bloke who has won the election give a speech saying that we were robbed."

Some may also say it's a bit rich for Turnbull to be attempting to take the high moral ground when he defended Peter Dutton, who contributed to the mother of all scare campaigns when the Immigration Minister said: "These people would be taking Australian jobs, there's no question about that."

And, of course, it was none other than the Prime Minister himself who accused Labor of "declaring war" on business. No scare campaign there!

When asked if

his language was insulting the intelligence of voters, Turnbull responded: "I am not exaggerating."

And so I suspect a lot of the frustration in Turnbull's speech was at himself.

Six months ago Labor were looking down the barrel at a horrible loss. The

December 2015 Christmas Newpoll, contained no yuletide for Bill Shorten or Labor. Labor's primary vote

had fallen

eight points since Tony Abbott left the Lodge, down to a four-year low.

Forget about winning any seats, Labor were set to lose them across the nation.

In contrast, the Coalition primary vote was up higher than the Sydney housing market. Up nine in Western Australia, to 48 per cent. Up six in Queensland to 45. Up four in NSW to 46.

And when it came to Preferred Prime Minister, Turnbull led Shorten by a margin of almost 50 per cent.

Labor's holiday nightmare was hearing that the PM was on the road to Yarralumla to call an early election.

Yet somehow, in the words of Robert Frost, Turnbull took the road less travelled. Or indeed no road at all.

In the meantime, Turnbull's performance faltered, his government drifted hopelessly and Coalition support began to fall through the floor.

One day there was a GST increase, then income tax powers for the states then — nothing.

The government was, to quote Joe Hildebrand, Seinfeld — a show about nothing.

Their one-trick pony was Senate voting reforms. Their rabbit-out-of-a-hat, the reason why they sat on their hands for months, we discovered, was they were hoping to be able to call a double dissolution election.

When it comes to stinking political judgments, this five-

month procrastination is now in the all-time hall of fame.

They parlayed a potential landslide victory, which would probably even have built on Abbott's 90 seats, into a bigger Senate rattle and a likely minority government.

Talk about a 20 cents in the dollar move.

And even if Turnbull does get to 76 seats, he is hardly in a great position. As a government you are basically held hostage by every backbencher, who demands their pet projects must be met or else.

Or, worse still, you are a bad salmon dish away from a hung parliament.

Ah, yes, Monty Python. On Saturday listening to the Prime Minister I thought of the famous Black Knight sketch.

After having both arms cut off in a sword fight, the Black Knight claims it is just "a flesh wound".

He fights on, and has a leg cut off. He shouts out: "I am invincible!" He then loses his other leg.

"All right," he says finally. "We'll call it a draw."

Malcolm Turnbull began Saturday morning with 90 of 150 House of Representatives seats and was rated a \$1.08 favourite by bookmakers to be re-elected.

He lost limbs all over Western Sydney, Tasmania, Queensland but gave an "I am invincible" speech, by claiming victory when he was in absolutely no position to do so.

How many legs will he have to lose before he finally calls it a draw?



# IT'S TIME TO PULL OUT THE TABLECLOTH



**JOHN ADAMS**

**T**he 2016 federal election has proven that Australia is suffering from the phenomenon of tablecloth democracy. Across many States and Territories, the plethora of political parties and independents running for the Australian Senate meant that the senate ballot papers were extraordinarily long in paper length. In some cases, for example

NSW, the ballot paper contained 41 columns and over 150 candidates and was longer than the voting cubicle provided by the AEC.

Anecdotal feedback from political operatives and voters indicates that the ball of paper posed difficulties in identifying specific political parties as well as being a physical obstacle to voting below the line.

Such long ballot papers do not serve the public interest and also serve to confuse voters. Experimental research by behavioural economists over the past decade indicates that people who face too much choice become demotivated to understand the differences among the choices on offer.

Applying this to voting for the Australian Senate, voters,

when faced with long ballot papers, will likely spend less time examining the political and policy choices on offer and are likely to cast either an ill-considered or even an informal vote.

Long ballot papers also provide an unfair advantage to those parties who are placed on the left hand side of the ballot, as apathetic or overwhelmed voters are likely to select parties placed on the left hand side in a simplified decision.

The main culprit behind the tablecloth phenomenon is the 500-person threshold requirement to establish a political party in Australia as stated in the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918. In a nation with over 15.4 million registered voters, the 500-person requirement

means that federally, political parties today only require 0.00003 per cent national public support in order to register and participate in elections.

This very low threshold has allowed single issue political parties to form and proliferate, fragmenting the overall Senate vote. Given the recent Senate voting reforms, this potentially provides a substantially lower quota requirement for the second last and last senate spots in the six states due to ballot exhaustion where preferences do not flow and are wasted.

The most sensible reforms to shrinking senate ballot papers and thus consolidating the vote would be to increase the minimum member threshold that political parties require to register with the AEC.

Such reform would be enhanced if ballot qualification requirements were introduced for every State or Territory requiring registered political parties to demonstrate a minimal amount of support within that jurisdiction in order to be eligible for placement on that jurisdiction's ballot paper.

A simplified example may be that political parties would need 5000 members across Australia in order to register with the AEC and that within a particular State or Territory, the party would need 1000 members in order to qualify for the Senate election ballot.

Such reforms would likely eliminate single issue political parties as political movements would need to be broader based and more relevant in

their political missions and policy menus to attract wider bases of sustainable political support.

Political aspirants would also be tested in their party's capacity to organise and engage with the community, which would lead to a more participatory democratic system. Moreover, regionally based parties such as the Nick Xenophon Team, the Katter Party, and the Jacqui Lambie Network would be limited in their ability to fragment the vote outside of their regional supporter base.

Policy makers should strive to create less cumbersome senate ballot papers to reduce voter confusion and vote fragmentation and allow more considered voting decisions.

John Adams is a former Coalition adviser

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## “ THEY SAID IT

“There are a number of political leaders who in my opinion have blood on their hands. The Bali bombing of 2005 would not have occurred if we haven't joined in the invasion of Iraq.”

Tasmanian MP Andrew Wilkie ignores the 2002 Bali bombing, which killed 10 times as many people and took place before Iraq's invasion.

“The Lindt cafe siege would not have occurred if we hadn't helped create the circumstances for the rise of Islamic State, which would appear to have been a motivator for the person involved in that siege.”

More from Wilkie, who was then corrected by columnist Andrew Bolt: “The Islamic State in fact grew strong in Syria, thanks in part to the decision of the West not to intervene there. That's where its capital is and its heartland.”

“As a humane and responsible government, we are left with no acceptable course of action except to close this industry down.”

Premier Mike Baird announces the end of greyhound racing in NSW.

“I feel much empathy for innocent trainers and those who will lose their job or hobby as a result of this. And I understand the disappointment of people who enjoy having a punt on the dogs. But we simply cannot and will not stand by and allow the widespread and systemic mistreatment of animals.”

Further from Baird.

“I'm not going to give up on this — it needs to be resolved one way or the other. Julian is an Australian and Australians should be treated fairly. This is only going to get worse and worse for them.”

Businessman Dick Smith tackles Sweden and the US over Julian Assange's long-term lodging at London's Ecuadorian embassy.

“A lot of what we were campaigning on nationally just wasn't resonating with everyday Australians.”

Western Australian Liberal MP Andrew Hastie (pictured) rues his party's lacklustre election campaign.

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# OH MY, WHAT A LONG ONE!



RACHEL CORBETT

As millions voted last Saturday it was with the expectation that when they put on their jammies and got into bed, this election would be over.

Instead, almost a week later, we're still watching the vote count rise incrementally and wondering what hot mess we've got in store for the next three years.

But after weeks of round-the-clock coverage we've had plenty of time to learn some important lessons from the campaign that just won't end.

## IT'S TIME TO GET ELECTRONIC VOTING

We can ride a wave in our lounge room thanks to the wonders of virtual reality, we can store our digital lives in a cloud and we've made it all the way to Mars but somehow I'm still casting my vote with a pencil.

## KYLIE MINOGUE WAS RIGHT

It's better the devil you know. After preference whispering delivered us a Senate that someone affectionately referred to as “the bar scene from Star Wars”, it was clear something needed to be done. Unfortunately, now that

we see what that something is we're all wondering if it's too late to ask the bloke who's enthused about motor vehicles to come back.

## EVERYTHING OLD IS NEW AGAIN

Many would argue an appearance on *Dancing With The Stars* would be the nail in the political credibility coffin, particularly if it comes after a stint in jail. But they didn't count on the resilience of political Energiser Bunny Pauline Hanson. She's back — and so is 1996, apparently. If only she could bring that decade's housing prices with her.

## THE SENATE ISN'T THE ONLY THING THAT NEEDS REFORM

I've got no doubt vote counting is tiring work but I'm not sure the best time to take a break is the Sunday and Monday after we discover we're in political limbo. The Medicare text shouldn't have fooled anyone. Medicare is a couple of steps away from issuing receipts on chiselled stone tablets. If the message had come from Medicare it wouldn't have been delivered via text, it would have been attached to a homing pigeon.

## IT PAYS TO BE A LOSER

Candidates are entitled to \$2.62 for every vote they receive, provided they get over 4 per cent, which means

that Rob Oakeshott's last-minute decision to run earned him over \$63,000. Or the equivalent of one dollar for every word that he tries to squeeze into the average conversation.

## BILL SHORTEN REALLY LIKES MEETING PEOPLE

The Opposition Leader has been basking in the afterglow of Saturday's non-result by partaking in his greatest love — meeting people. In fact, if we don't get to a decision soon there won't be a baby left un-kissed. Won't somebody think of the children!

## THE ONE PLACE TRUST EXISTS IN POLITICS IS AT THE POLLS

After turning up at a polling booth without my wallet I realised you don't need to show identification to vote. I can't rent a video without showing my driver's licence but I can make a decision about the leader of the country. I guess no one in their right mind would voluntarily put themselves through that process twice.

## WE WANT THIS TO BE OVER

We have no government but for two days this week the front page has been occupied by the news that Kieren Jack's mum was upset she didn't get invited to his football match. If that doesn't tell you we're over it, I don't know what does. It also tells you parents shouldn't be allowed to tweet.

## IT'S NOT OVER UNTIL THE FAT LADY SINGS

Somebody put Clive Palmer in a dress and give that woman a microphone.

@RachelCorbett

# PLACATING EVIL ISN'T TOLERANCE



KEVIN DONNELLY

Tim Soutphommasane, Australia's Race Discrimination Commissioner, argues in the Fairfax press: “Every member of our society should be free to live without fear of discrimination. This includes being free to practise their religion, as guaranteed by section 116 of the Constitution.”

Wrong. While the Constitution states: “The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion”, those responsible would not accept that all

religious beliefs should be tolerated.

The reality is not all religions are peaceful and tolerant and it's clear that some religious practices and beliefs are un-Australian.

The Hindu caste system discriminates against “untouchables”, and the system of dowry — when husbands demand money and gifts from their prospective wives' families — still leads to violence and death.

Best illustrated by Ayaan Hirsi Ali's latest book *Heretic*, it's also true that Islamic fundamentalism is inherently violent. While arguing that the majority of Muslims are “peaceful and law-abiding”, Hirsi Ali cites multiple examples of unacceptable religious practices.

Based on her own experience as a child growing up in Somalia, Hirsi Ali describes the widespread practice of female genital mutilation and arranged marriages.

And her experience is not unique. According to the World Health Organisation “more than 200 million

girls and women alive today have been cut in 30 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia”.

In England, Prime Minister David Cameron admits “20,000 children are still at risk” and one Australian organisation suggests up to “three girls a day are born in Australia who are at high risk”.

Hirsi Ali also writes that in Pakistan those who blaspheme against the Prophet are “punishable by death”, in Saudi Arabia “churches and synagogues are outlawed”, in Iran “stoning is an acceptable punishment” and in Brunei, under sharia law, “homosexuality is punishable by death”.

It's clear not all religions support and protect the rights and freedoms we take for granted.

Instead of cultural relativism, so much favoured by the cultural Left, we should acknowledge that some religious practices are beyond the pale and that Western culture and Christianity are preferable.

Australia is a Western, liberal

democracy based on the Westminster system, and Christianity underpins our political and legal systems.

The Constitution's preamble refers to “Almighty God” and parliaments around Australia begin with the Lord's Prayer.

Concepts such as sanctity of life, commitment to the common good, the separation of church and state and free will owe as much to the New Testament as to the Enlightenment and political philosophers such as John Stuart Mill.

While there is no doubt Western culture and Christianity are far from perfect, as argued by Arthur M. Schlesinger, “the crimes committed by the West have produced their own antidotes. They have produced great movements to end slavery, to raise the status of women, to abolish torture, to combat racism, and to advance personal liberty and human rights.”

Dr Kevin Donnelly is a senior research fellow at the Australian Catholic University.