



Why The Libs Will Never GetUp!

Publish Date:

June 2017

Many things will be talked about when the Liberal Party's hierarchy gather in Sydney this weekend for their federal council meeting. Those focused on the short-term will be discussing two numbers – 14 and 30.

The Coalition under Malcolm Turnbull has now lost 14 consecutive Newspoll surveys to Labor. Famously, the current PM said the former PM had to be removed because the Liberals had lost "30 Newspolls in a row". Those focused on the long-term will be contemplating the future for the Liberal Party and for liberalism in the years ahead.

No doubt there'll be some debate about how bright that future is. Whether a centre-right version of GetUp! can be created to campaign for the Liberals in the same way GetUp! campaigns for the Labor Party will inevitably be raised as a topic – as it's been raised in Liberal and conservative circles for years. After about one minute's reflection, any Liberal who knows anything at all about politics will come to the conclusion that there's no way a non-left wing version of GetUp! can be developed to assist the Liberal Party.





For as long as the Liberals' parliamentary leadership continues to claim their policies are "pragmatic", "non-ideological" and "centrist" there'll never be a centre-right version of GetUp! campaigning for the Liberals. The reason someone sits in a cold and blowy church hall on a Wednesday night in the middle of winter telephoning strangers asking for their vote is because they want to change the world. Opening our borders to refugees is changing the world. As is cutting the country's emissions of carbon dioxide to zero.

The objectives of the left might be hopelessly misconceived, but to those who believe in them have convinced themselves such objectives are ambitious, optimistic, and positive.

The left-wing politicians supported by the likes of GetUp! aren't afraid to talk about their ideology of social change. Many Liberal MPs are terrified of admitting they're motivated by a political philosophy. The Liberals' last federal budget promised higher taxes, higher government spending, and more regulation.

If you agreed with such things you probably wouldn't join a Liberal-leaning GetUp! The chances are you'd be out campaigning for the Greens. Liberals now fear GetUp! nearly as much as they fear the ACTU. One of the reasons some backbench Liberal MPs gave for not supporting a repeal of Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act is they were worried GetUp! would campaign against them.

The capacity of the left to mobilise grassroots community activism has always been admired from afar by the Liberals. In recent years that's turned to fear as activism has been harnessed into marginal seat campaigns that could decide elections. Of course much of that "grassroots" activism is nothing of the kind – it is scripted, coordinated, and funded by trade unions and left-wing, non-government organisations.

Young people are particularly susceptible to left-community activism because for nearly all of their life everything they got was given to them by someone else. The core message of the left is that there's always someone else to pay. Bitter experience of the real world gets older people to vote a certain way, whereas misplaced idealism is what directs young people to vote they way they do.

Passion goes a long way in politics. Jeremy Corbyn, who'd be the British prime minister now if 2227 voters out of 32 million had changed their ballot, might not be exactly passionate, but he had more passion than Theresa May. Donald Trump was passionate. Hillary Clinton was not. A few months before the election Clinton couldn't comprehend how Trump would be generating such momentum and so many donations given, that her campaign had 800 paid staff, and Trump's had only 130. It's hard to recall the last time a Liberal politician in Australia was passionate ... about anything.

Perhaps the last time a Liberal displayed some passion was on election night last year when Malcolm Turnbull thought he might have lost the election. If the Liberals ever presented an ambitious policy agenda of personal and economic freedom, and if they got passionate about it, then they wouldn't need a centre-right GetUp! They'd be able to win elections on their own.

Originally published in:



The Australian Financial Review