



Right Needs Bernardi's New Voice

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In the long run, Cory Bernardi leaving the Liberal Party to start his own conservative movement will help the Liberal Party and will strengthen centre-right politics in Australia. Centre-right politics needs more voices, not fewer, and it needs voices that are not constrained by the limits of day-to-day parliamentary politics.

Cory Bernardi will still be in the senate, but instead of spending his time toeing the party line and seeking ministerial preferment, he'll be able to propagate ideas, something few parliamentarians have the ability or inclination to do. Those who deride Bernardi as a caricature of a social conservative have little understanding of his philosophy. On social issues he's certainly conservative, but on economics he's more likely to incline toward freemarket libertarianism.

Having in the Senate David Leyonhjelm from the Liberal Democrats and Bob Day from Family First has been good for the centre-right, and the same will apply when Cory Bernardi sits as an independent. The more voices in Parliament of the centreright who are not of the Liberal Party, the better it will be for the centre-right, and the better for the Liberals.



It is true that Bernardi was elected to the Senate as a Liberal just seven months ago, and he'll have to explain to those who voted for him why he's made the decision he has.

Those Liberals now complaining about broken promises to the electorate should remember how before the 2013 federal election they swore black and blue they wouldn't change tax on superannuation.

In the short run, Bernardi leaving the Liberals is a headache the prime minister doesn't need. But whether Malcolm Turnbull wins the next election won't be determined by what Bernardi did this week.

The ecosystem of the centre-left in Australia comprises the Labor Party and a host of its surrogates including trade unions, the judiciary, government-funded media, community organisations (including the churches), and much of academia and the public service. And as much as those in the ALP might complain about the existence of a political party on its left, the rise of the Greens has greatly assisted the Labor Party achieve its agenda.

On the centre-right there's the Liberal and National parties, a number of privately funded think tanks, some media commentators (none of whom work at the ABC) and a handful of university professors.

Business organisations and the corporate sector stopped supporting the centre-right in Australia a long time ago. In any case "business groups" are among the least trusted organisations in Australia, according to a recent Essential poll 27 per cent of Australians trusted "business groups". The only group with a lower score was "political parties", trusted by just 17 per cent of people.

The Liberal Party dominates its side of the ideological spectrum, in a way the ALP does not. The result of such dominance is that centre-right thinking in Australia is inevitably focused on the politics of Parliament. In contrast centre-left thinking in this country is focused on the politics of society. In parliamentary politics it pays to be "pragmatic". In the battle of ideas being "pragmatic" guarantees defeat. The centre-left appreciates what the centre-right doesn't understand. Politics is the product of culture. What happens in Parliament today is the result of what was said in a university lecture theatre decades earlier. Since John Howard's first election victory in 1996, the Coalition has won six federal elections, drawn one and lost one.

What the centre-right has to show for its federal election victories is debatable.

It speaks volumes that after a political ascendancy of most of the past two decades, the Coalition can't even garner sufficient community support to pass a modest cut to the company tax rate implemented over the next 10 years.

The Coalition is a long way from being able to build the sort of community consensus required to take the sort of action necessary to eventually bring the budget into surplus and reduce the country's debt. While Bernardi was a Liberal, the Liberals could point to at least one high profile member of its parliamentary party who was attempting to understand the meaning of Brexit and



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