

Dear Mr Turnbull,

I am a member of the ALP, but I would like your government to do some urgently necessary things a Shorten government will not do. I don't think you will do them either except as part of a general "reset" motivated by a desire to win the next election. I am writing to suggest such a reset. (Written in March 2018, revised August.)

I suggest you meet your cabinet and speak along the following lines:

I think we must face the fact that our election prospects are not good. We may scrape back in, but we really want and need a decisive victory. I recognise that my leadership is in question: I have lost a lot of the support in the electorate that I had at first. Some of you may think I should retire and go to the back bench. But I don't intend to do that. I want to put up a fight, and that requires a 'reset', starting with the framework within which the government operates.

I am no longer willing to have my hands tied by any secret agreements, such as the L-NP Coalition agreement. I am exiting from that agreement, as of now; I want to negotiate a new agreement. My exit from the existing agreement means that the National Party is entitled to withdraw from the coalition, in which case I will continue with a Liberal minority government. But I hope that won't happen. I hope we can make a new agreement, determining which ministries will be allocated to National Party members and perhaps other matters: but an essential condition is that the new agreement must be published. I'm not willing to be constrained by an agreement the public hasn't seen. Both parties to the agreement must take public responsibility for the constraints it imposes on the government.

Also, I want it understood from now on, if I continue as Prime Minister, that the policies of the government are not determined by majority vote in Cabinet, still less by vote in the party room. I'm a good listener, but it's up to the Prime Minister to decide how much discussion is enough and what the outcome is. I recognise that if I abuse this prerogative, the party, or the Parliament, will replace me.

So much for framework. I also want a reset on a number of policies. This is in effect the program I want to take to the coming election.

Manus and Nauru: The government will announce a date in the not-too-distant future, by early 2019, by which the people who have been detained on Manus and Nauru will have left those places, coming to Australia if no third-country settlement can be found before that date. Meanwhile we will ameliorate their living conditions.

Australia will quit the 1951 Refugee Convention (quitting requires a year's notice) and we will negotiate a new agreement on refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants with the other countries in this region, including Indonesia.

Company tax: We will abandon attempts to legislate future company tax reductions at least for the remainder of this parliamentary term and for the next.

Instead of "trickle down" we will practice "filter up"—a rising tide lifts all boats. We will make a generous improvement to the NewStart allowance and other support for

people who find it difficult to make a decent living. Increasing their purchasing power will drive jobs and growth.

We will revisit “robot-debt” and make refunds and apologies. We will legislate to provide that no one will be asked to produce documents they had not been told beforehand they might need to produce.

Our political system needs improvements. We will establish the body called for in the Uluru “Statement from the Heart”. But we will not do this through a referendum to change the constitution; we will establish the body by legislation, with the possibility of constitutional entrenchment later.

We need a federal ICAC. We need to enforce more rigorous standards of probity in public life. In particular we need to make sure that politicians are not influenced by expectations of lucrative employment after retirement from politics. We need new rules for the real-time disclosure of political donations. There must be proper procedures for appointing political staffers.

We must meet our commitments under the Paris agreement on climate change. The NEG must not only reduce electricity prices but also reduce greenhouse emissions. There will be no attempt to prolong the use of coal.

We need urgent action to protect the profession of journalism from the inroads of Google, Facebook and the like: We may need to direct some government resources to the support of quality journalism. We need to find a suitable way of doing that.

In foreign affairs we should make renewed efforts to end the conflict between Israel and Palestine. We should say we will recognise a state of Palestine if the Palestinians meet the requirements of Art.4 of the UN Charter (essentially that they be in control of their territory and at peace with other countries, including Israel). That will need a lot of work on their part, and we should encourage them by promising that if they meet the requirements of the Charter we will recognise their state.

We need to disengage Australian military forces from conflicts in the Middle East and avoid being drawn into conflicts in Asia. We should legislate to provide that Parliamentary approval is needed for any overseas deployment that may result in armed conflict.

The atmosphere and style of politics in this country needs to change. Opponents, critics, citizens, should be treated with courtesy and respect. We should not make personal attacks on opponents. At present the public does not have much respect for politics and politicians. We must change our ways.

I’m willing to reconsider all these proposals, if there are good objections, or better alternatives. But I believe we must make this reset, or something very much like it. If you back me in this, I believe we can win the next election—not just scrape in, but win decisively. If you won’t back me, then I must consider my position. I am not willing to continue as we have been going.

(What does “consider my position” mean? It means either resigning as PM, or calling an election. Better not to say which.)

The arithmetic of winning the next election is obvious. You need **to attract the votes of many people who currently intend to vote Labor**, without losing too many votes of people who currently intend to vote for the Coalition.

The key point is this. When preferences are allocated, voters to your right will vote for you even if you move somewhat to the left, just as voters to the left of Labor will still vote Labor even if it moves somewhat to the right. Greens voters don't like Labor much and like Mr Shorten even less, but in almost all House of Representatives seats **they will in the end preference Labor over Liberal**, because if they don't fill out the preferences their vote is informal. Similarly, voters at the right end of the spectrum will in the end vote for LNP candidates, however much they don't like you. You will not be replaced as leader between now and the next election (especially since opponents in your party know that you can call an election at any time) [Turned out to be wrong: the Liberals went mad, Turnbull did not threaten an election]. Your side of politics **cannot retain government except by supporting the positions you take**. You can rely on their support, even if it is reluctant, while you seek support from electors who currently intend to vote Labor.

In the United States parties need to do divisive things to “mobilise the base” because many people eligible to vote don't bother. For US parties galvanising supporters who might not have turned out to vote may well be a more cost-effective tactic than trying to switch votes away from the other party. But in this country mobilising the base is not an effective tactic. Most of the people who could ever be motivated to vote will turn out anyway. So you need to adopt policies that will persuade people currently intending to vote Labor to switch to the Coalition instead. Members of the coalition parties must accept this, if they want your side to win the next election.

SOME ISSUES

(1) Manus and Nauru

I have written to you before on this issue. See
<http://members.iinet.net.au/~akilcull@homemail.com.au/Message2TurnbullFeb.html>,
<http://members.iinet.net.au/~akilcull@homemail.com.au/Message2TurnbullAugust.html>
<http://members.iinet.net.au/~akilcull@homemail.com.au/MessagesToTurnbull.html>

(a) Give the detainees (or former detainees) a definite end-date, i.e. to make a public promise now that by a certain date in the not too distant future they will no longer be in PNG or Nauru (unless they freely choose to stay), but in some country where they can make a living and live safely with their human rights respected. Setting an end-date will give a limited time to find third-country settlements. Maybe New Zealand will take a few, perhaps some other countries may (it might be worth trying to negotiate with European countries for a swap), but when the time runs out the rest will be brought to Australia. Giving them an end-date means that their detention is no longer indefinite. It gives them hope.

(b) “Denounce” the 1951 Convention (<http://www.unhcr.org/4d934f5f9.pdf>, art.45) and announce your intention to enter into **a new agreement with countries in our region** on refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants. Denouncing the convention will please voters to your

right, but it will also please voters to your left. Anyone who has thought much about people-flow believes that the problems require regional solutions. The Fraser government participated in a regional plan regarding Vietnamese boat people, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comprehensive_Plan_of_Action

A new agreement must secure **the right to work**, which according to the UN Declaration is a human right, art. 23(1), <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>. Denial of this right compels displaced people to move on, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ASA28/010/2010/en/>. It is obviously better for refugees/migrants to work for their living than to depend on handouts.

People in refugee camps feel insecure because their support may be cut off; that's why they move. On the World Food Program announcement that triggered the 2015 stampede to Europe (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Alan_Kurdi) see <https://www.wfp.org/news/news-release/wfp-forced-make-deeper-cuts-food-assistance-syrian-refugees-due-lack-funding>

Many of the contortions of Australian policy under Howard and since seem to be an attempt to evade the 1951 convention while pretending to observe it. It would be better to exit from it and deal with the problems in an honest way. (One contortion has recently been invalidated: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/jul/21/1600-asylum-claims-could-be-reopened-due-to-poorly-drafted-regulation>.)

“Turning back the boats” is like putting bars across windows to prevent people from jumping out because they don't want to burn to death. People take to boats because their circumstances are intolerable. They know what risk they take. The flow is not the result of marketing by “people smugglers”. See <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-06-25/iranian-refugee-life-on-hold-in-jakarta/9735548>, <http://jakartaglobe.id/news/asylum-seekers-refugees-stranded-indonesias-immigration-detention-centers/>

The “drownings” argument that Liberal and Labor politicians use to justify the ill-treatment of boat people is a disgraceful travesty of ethical reasoning. See my comments on the remarks you made at Wayside Chapel, December 2016, here: <http://members.iinet.net.au/~akilcull@homemail.com.au/Detention.html>

The boat journey is dangerous because Australian government policy makes it so. Confiscation of boats means that the boats are decrepit, imprisonment of crew (except juveniles) means that the crew are juveniles.

(2) A Federal ICAC

Set up a federal ICAC to enforce the rules and to suggest better rules. The current rules are too lax; too many objectionable things are legal. Here are two instances. Mr Robb had a job lined up with a Chinese firm before he finished as a minister; under the existing rules he cannot lobby on certain matters, but this does not mean that he was not influenced in his behaviour while a minister by the prospect of a job. The job may be a sinecure. Another example involves Eric Roozendaal and other ALP politicians in NSW: they gave a position in the NSW Parliament to a Chinese firm's nominee in exchange for employment with the firm for Mr Roozendaal. Something similar could happen in the Senate. Another example: <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/prosecution-of-witness-k-and-his-lawyer-is-a->

[disgraceful-act-of-revenge-20180701-p4zou5.html](#) We need a rule that politicians (and members of their family and other associates) cannot accept jobs with firms they have had dealings with while in office for at least (say) 5 years afterwards. The rule will have to be refined in the light of experience of attempts to get around it.

Mr Joyce, Mr Abbott, Mr Sukkar and others will say ([here](#) and [here](#)) that a federal ICAC is not needed because existing safeguards are enough. But despite whatever safeguards there are, it is widely (and I think rightly) believed that there is a lot of corruption. The suspicion of political corruption alienates many citizens.

Sir Humphry will tell you that you must work out all the details before you do anything, i.e. do nothing. I say: Set up a federal ICAC immediately, make simple and obvious rule changes first, then deal with the evasions as they come to light, with the ICAC's advice. Don't spend too much time deciding which is the best version of an ICAC; it can be modified later as experience suggests. (But start it off without the power, except with the Attorney-General's approval, to hold public hearings.)

(3) Political Staffers

Abolish, or at least greatly reduce, politicians' power to appoint political staff paid for by the tax-payer. See <https://theconversation.com/the-barnaby-joyce-affair-highlights-australias-weak-regulation-of-ministerial-staffers-91744>. There was a time when politicians' offices were staffed by public servants. These days politicians have considerable patronage, which is one of the bases of factionalism. If they want political staffers the parties should pay their salaries.

(4) Political Donations

See [here](#), "The truth about political donations: what we don't know". See Ann Twomey's [criticism](#) of your government's legislation on foreign donations. Foreign donations are not the only problem. Donations should be from individuals only (not organisations or companies), using their own money, declared in real time. This would set the ALP free from unions, which would be good for the unions (they would not be used by people to further their political ambitions), for the ALP (it would not be controlled by union officials and the factions that form round them), and for the country. Prohibition of corporate donations would also set the Liberal and National Parties free from big business. Liberal and, especially, National Party policy-making often looks like trawling for donations. Their love of coal-fired generation is a case in point. Joe Hockey used to suffer acute aesthetic pain when he saw a wind-turbine, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-09-16/wind-farms-ruin-the-landscape-and-look-appalling:-hockey/5748346> .

Money that can't be donated to political parties will go to other campaigning organisations. Perhaps the same rules should apply to all organisations that accept donations. But it may not be much of a problem. If the ACTU campaigns for the Labor Party or the Mining Council campaigns for the Nationals, voters know where they are coming from and can make allowance for bias. The problem is the hidden bias in political parties due to hidden donations, or the desire to elicit such donations.

In my view, it is not necessary to limit the size of political donations, or to block foreign donations, as long as there is transparency. This will require continuous vigilance to counter work-arounds.

In place of large private donations, public money should be made available to facilitate a more deliberative democracy—town hall meetings, deliberative polling, etc. It would be good if less money were spent on short TV advertisements, robocalls, Facebook, Twitter, etc. There should be more opportunities for real discussion and debate. See my submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters on the 2004 election.

There are other things you could do to improve the workings of our political system that would appeal to the very large number disillusioned voters. Here are a few:

(5) Parliamentary representation

Acknowledge the virtual disfranchisement in House of Representatives elections of people who live in safe seats. During the last election you tried to persuade voters that every vote would count. “This is going to be a very close election. Every seat matters, every vote matters. And I say to every Australian... that every vote counts and they should treat their vote, regardless of what seat they are in, as though it was the vote, the single vote that decides the next government. Every vote counts.” This statement was simply false, as I’m sure you knew, because everyone knows. See comment by Barrie Cassidy. Political parties run “marginal seat campaigns”; governments on both sides have “pork barrelled” shamelessly in marginal seats (here and here); factions struggle to appropriate safe seats.

We need multi-member constituencies in the House of Representatives, maybe 7 members in dense population areas, 5 and 3 members in less dense, retaining single member constituencies for regions of low population density. Again see my submission. The ACT electoral system is a good model.

As in the ACT, federal elections need “Robson rotation”, which enables voters to weed out unsatisfactory Parliamentarians without having to vote against their party. When a candidate is discredited on the eve of an election (e.g. Trevor Ruthenberg) supporters can simply switch their preference to one of the Party’s other candidates. Robson Rotation distributes equally between a party’s candidates the votes of voters who support the party but don’t have a preference between its candidates. It establishes an equivalent to a “primary” built into the election itself.

Robson rotation also checks attempts by ideological factions to win control. (This is a serious problem not only in the Labor Party but also in the Liberal Party. See <https://www.theage.com.au/politics/victoria/mormon-influence-rising-in-liberal-party-20180505-p4zdjb.html>, <https://theconversation.com/nsw-liberals-factional-battles-stand-in-way-of-reform-but-changes-in-participation-demand-it-63710>.) If some faction puts up “extremist” candidates, “moderate” voters can give their higher preference to other candidates.

(6) The Uluru statement

Establish the body called for by the Uluru statement, not through a referendum but by legislation, with the prospect of a constitutional amendment after it has been tried for a while to assess its value. Mr Joyce's claim, promptly echoed by you, that the Uluru statement calls for a "third chamber of Parliament" was a falsehood. Joyce may have believed it, but I'm sure you didn't.

Here are your words in Parliament, spoken passionately with every appearance of sincere conviction: "We take the view that every one of our national elected representative institutions should be open to every Australian citizen. We believe that is a fundamental part of our democracy and the rule of law....I hear the shouts of indignation. This, clearly, will be a big election issue at the next election. We stand for all of our national representative institutions, including the House and the Senate, being open to, filled by and voted for by every Australian citizen." You must have known that you were speaking nonsense.

If it is a big election issue, and if you argue for it in those terms, you will deservedly lose many votes. An elected advisory body is obviously not inconsistent with democracy, the rule of law, equal voting rights and other principles, since it would only give advice.

(7) Shorten's constitutional proposals

Come out clearly against fixed four-year Parliamentary terms and against a directly elected Head of State. Some people whose votes you want favour these things, but voters will respect you if you take a stand and give good reasons. Voters will also understand that proper discussion of these matters must come before any move toward a republic. The idea of a vote "in principle" on a republic to be followed later by a decision on how the head of state is to be selected is a stupid tactic: voters will vote No in the first round if they think it likely that a model they don't support will be chosen in the second round. The model has to have wide support before there is any point in a referendum, so the first step is to discuss the model. **You could introduce now, without needing a referendum**, legislation to establish a Parliamentary process for nominating future Governors-General.

It is most important to **reject fixed terms**. A government must be able to appeal to the electorate to resolve a Parliamentary deadlock. There will be situations in which no party or coalition has a secure majority. Our parliamentary system can cope with "minority governments", including minority governments that have no guarantee of supply or confidence. (See here, and note "jumping majorities", and here.) Completely abolishing the Prime Minister's right to appeal to the electorate would be a step in the direction of the US system in which Congress and the President may be at loggerheads with no way of resolving their disagreements. This is one of the most serious weaknesses of the US political system. This should be obvious to anyone who follows US politics.

Another unusual situation that should be provided for is that a party may win government under one leader but then drop that leader and substitute another. Replacement of a leader may be perfectly legitimate: there is and should be no rule that a Prime Minister cannot be replaced except by losing an election. But it is essential that a Prime Minister threatened with replacement should be able to appeal to the electorate if he or she believes that electors still support their government. (This is what Mr Rudd should have said he would do when Ms Gillard came back into the room and reneged on their earlier agreement.) On fixed terms see my submission to JSCEM.

There is a case, however, for restricting the power of a Prime Minister to call an election just whenever it is politically advantageous. I suggest that the government reject Mr Shorten's proposal for a referendum to amend the constitution to provide four year fixed terms and instead introduce legislation modelled on 24B of the NSW constitution. This would not be a constitutional amendment, it would be ordinary legislation.

(8) Support professional journalism

Re-read your 2011 speech. It should be possible to find some way citizens can select which professional journalists should be supported by public money (through fellowships or the like).

Another improvement to the political system that many disillusioned voters would be interested in relates to the profession of journalism. The work of professional journalists is important in sorting fact from fiction.

Suggestions (2) – (8) are about machinery and process. You could adopt any of them without departing from Liberal principles. Here are some similarly non-partisan suggestions on policy.

(9) Robodebt

This has done a lot of damage to many vulnerable people and a lot of damage to the government's standing with people whose votes you need. People who have been unfairly badgered should be given an apology and refunds. The principle should be adopted that **no one will be asked to produce documentation unless they have been told beforehand that they might need to produce it** (cf. the limit on the time for which tax documents need to be kept). The onus must be on the government to prove indebtedness, not on the citizen to prove they do not owe anything. The fact that money has been recovered and someone jailed does nothing to justify the stress put upon many honest people.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/apr/04/centrelink-robo-debt-program-accused-of-enforcing-illegal-debts>, <https://auspublaw.org/2018/04/robo-debt-illegality/>

In its hostility toward the poor, your party has become “the nasty party”, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2002/oct/08/uk.conservatives2002>.

(10) Address the issues that especially affect young people

Housing affordability (including affordability of rental accommodation) and job security (see the recent British report on the “gig economy”) should be high priorities. Like Centrelink payments and robodebt, these are issues that especially young people regard as urgent. Another thing they, especially, regard as urgent is—

(11) Climate change

Re-read your 2011 speech, <http://masg.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Malcolm-Turnbull-aug-2011.pdf>.

What is needed is a “cap and trade” system; nothing else will actually reduce emissions in a cost-effective way to the extent required. You should consult Mark Butler and the Greens and commit to a new consensus policy well before the next election.

You should rule out any attempt to use the NEG to “lock in” meaningless targets, <https://reneweconomy.com.au/renewables-beware-labor-may-not-be-able-to-change-emissions-target-57040/> , <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/apr/17/national-energy-guarantee-will-lock-in-poor-climate-outcomes-act-says>.

Failures of successive governments to deal with this issue may well account for much of the disillusion with politics among younger people, e.g. the parents of young children, or young people who have decided not to have children. Children now alive in Australia—my grandchildren! and yours—may die prematurely and in very unpleasant circumstances if climate change happens as predicted. See [here](#) and [here](#). The government must stop campaigning for coal and against renewables. (What a stupid campaign! The only sense I can make of it is that the Liberal and National parties want donations from coal companies.)

For attempts of mine to get the Labor party to take effective action on climate change see <http://members.iinet.net.au/~akilcull@homemail.com.au/MessagesOnClimateChange.html>

(12) Jobs and Growth

Your present policy of tax cuts for large companies faces strong criticism, to the effect that much of the revenue sacrificed will not go to increase employment. Even if you were right about the economics, it would be difficult to sell the policy against a lot of apparently expert opinion ([here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), etc.)

Your treasurer’s attempted explanations are incoherent. He seems to think that the normal rules on supply and demand were suspended during the GFC! He should find out a bit about macroeconomics. Increased demand for labour leading to increased wages may provoke a rise in interest rates which may cause a set-back.

The company tax proposal will not be a vote-winner at the next election, quite the opposite, and it will not get through the next Senate. It is a zombie measure. The revenue that would be sacrificed in giving tax cuts to large companies and wealthy individuals would be better spent on **improving the support given to the unemployed** and others who live in poverty. Poorer people will spend the money, they will spend much of it locally (including in depressed regions), they will spend much of it with small businesses, they may set up their own small businesses in their locality.

(13) Tax reform

Tax reform should be a high priority. I don’t mean just tax cuts. The aim should be to raise more revenue from wealthier people. In particular, government should tax the various forms of economic rent; Liberal economists have been recommending this since David Ricardo. Taxes on rent do not reduce incentives, do not reduce reward for enterprise and hard work, because economic rent is not a reward for effort of any kind. Rent is a component of higher incomes, which justifies progressive taxation.

“Living within our means” is a misleading slogan: our “means” are not fixed but can be increased by wise government spending, including on improving the lot of the poorest people.

(14) Car industry, defence industry

Submarines and defence industry expansion are not an adequate substitute for car making. Messrs. Abbott and Hockey deliberately drove the car makers out because they relied on subsidies. Tariffs are better than subsidies (both are contrary to free trade), because the cost of tariffs falls on the buyers of the protected product whereas the cost of subsidies falls on the general taxpayer and subsidises the buyers. Establish an electric-car-making industry protected (temporarily) by tariffs. Buy submarines and other defence equipment on the world market.

(15) Free trade agreements

Promise there will be no more so-called “free trade” deals without independent critical examination and proper Parliamentary debate. The proposed TPP should be discussed properly.

(16) A Bill of Rights

You should resist demands to legislate “religious freedom” except as part of a wider “bill of rights”. A bill of rights should be legislation, not a constitutional amendment. It could be modelled on the Canadian Bill of Rights (1960), later entrenched in the constitution as a Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982). It makes no attempt to spell out the rights but simply lists them in general terms (e.g. “freedom of religion”), leaving it to the courts to work out what the rights imply in particular cases. The “notwithstanding” clause gives Parliament power in some circumstances to override the Bill of Rights.

(17) Recognition of Palestine

You should adopt my suggestions in relation to the recognition of Palestine. Recognition of Palestine will be a major issue at the next ALP National Conference. It will be a big fight; Mr Shorten is out of step with many Labor voters.

Palestine should not be recognised as a state now, as is, but Australia should promise, and try to persuade the US and other countries to promise, that Australia will recognise Palestine and support its full admission to the United Nations as soon as, in our government’s judgment, it meets the conditions of UN Charter Art. 4.

My suggestion is not anti-Semitic or anti-Israel, but it does address the concern of people who believe the Palestinians have been badly treated and that this is bad for the Palestinians, bad for Israel, for the Middle East, and for “the West”.

Supporters of Israel have for a long time insisted that a “two state solution” can come about only through bi-lateral negotiation between Israel and the Palestinians. This gives, and is intended to give, a veto to the government of Israel, which no Israeli politician could ever fail to exercise: the day will never come when Israel’s Prime Minister announces that s/he is satisfied with the concessions the Palestinian leaders have made--and no Palestinian leader

could ever offer anything that Israel could accept as sufficient. No leader on either side could survive making an agreement. A two-state solution can come about only through the process for admitting new states that was laid down when the UN was established, i.e. Art. 4.

Australian politicians on both sides present themselves as “friends of Israel”. You have been sycophantic toward Netanyahu: here, here, here, here. (Note the Israeli flag in the Beersheeba re-enactment; the battle had no connection whatever with the Balfour Declaration, Australian forces were not fighting for Israel.) True friends of Israel want the Jewish-Muslim conflict settled.

(18) Overseas military deployments

You should legislate to require Parliamentary approval of overseas military deployments. Many people for many years have advocated this change because it is really needed to protect Australia against rash military involvements. There is a significant asymmetry in US and Australian obligations under ANZUS concealed in the phrase “in accordance with its constitutional processes” (see my paper). The Australian constitution does not need to be amended, but the Australian “constitutional process” can be altered by ordinary legislation to restrict the royal prerogative in the matter of overseas force deployment.

The above suggestions relate to policy: they are things your government could do, without any departure from the basic ideas of the Liberal Party, that would appeal to people currently intending to vote Labor; I’m suggesting them because I think they are things that should be done.

There are also matters of political style. You should give up personal attacks on Bill Shorten. Focus on explaining your own proposals. Reject his proposals, answer his arguments, but leave his character alone. When one politician accuses another of lying, the sceptical voter thinks, “Yes, they are all liars”. Don’t make angry or contemptuous attacks on the Labor Party or the unions. The question time performances MPs think are brilliant the public regard with contempt. Government members should be discouraged from asking point-scoring questions, ministers from giving point-scoring answers. Maybe you should copy the British “Prime ministers questions” and set a good example.

Some of your attacks on Shorten have been not only disrespectful toward him but also degrading to you. “I mean, Blackout Bill, fair dinkum, as my old dad would have said, he is so hopeless he could not find his backside with both hands”. My old dad would never have said a thing like that. You have accused Shorten of “sucking up” to billionaires: what image does that suggest?

You should enforce proper standards of respectful speech on all your cabinet. Google to “screaming LNP senator” and watch the youtube video. Senator Cash is incorrigible. You made excuses for her recent performance. No provocation could excuse her slur on the women in Shorten’s office, no apology could make up for it. You should have sacked her from your ministry.

Politicians seem to think it’s clever to dodge questions. Interviewers try several times, until it’s clear to listeners that the politician is being evasive, and then move on. Kelly O’Dwyer’s

famous performance on *Insiders* (<https://mumbrella.com.au/kelly-odwyers-insiders-appearance-was-textbook-bad-media-training-513222>) is just one illustration of the reflexive evasiveness of most politicians.

Corruption, trawling for donations, abuse of politicians' entitlements, unregulated appointment of political staffers, evasion of questions, lying, etc. bring the political class into disrepute. Failure to deal with major policy issues such as climate change weakens support for our political system. Your government's treatment of vulnerable people, the poor, job seekers, centrelink clients, asylum seekers etc. has antagonised voters whose support you need. Your failure since becoming Prime Minister to stand up for values people thought you believed in has seriously damaged your credibility. What will your political obituaries look like?

Yours faithfully,

John Kilcullen

Addendum

When Turnbull replaced Abbott there was an upsurge of hope on the part of people who had followed his previous political career. We had noticed things like the following:

<https://theaimn.com/malcolm-turnbull-used-think-asylum-seekers/>

<https://www.wheelercentre.com/broadcasts/podcasts/the-wheeler-centre/malcolm-turnbull-at-the-deakins>

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-12-08/turnbull-the-future-of-newspapers-the-end-of-journalism/3719482>

<https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2012/april/1337744204/robert-manne/one-morning-malcolm>

<https://www.malcolmturnbull.com.au/issues/leadership-in-times-of-uncertainty-the-2013-sir-john-monash-oration-at-the>

<https://theconversation.com/can-malcolm-turnbull-be-a-liberal-leader-for-the-21st-century-47486>

<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/fragment/we-need-respect-intelligence-australian-people-turnbull> (“A style of leadership that respects the people's intelligence, that explains these complex issues and then sets out the course of action we believe we should take and makes a case for it.”)

However, his Prime Ministership failed, perhaps simply because he conceptualised our political system as “Cabinet government”: it ended up as party-room government, with Turnbull simply the chairman trying to find a consensus. He seems not to have realised that a

Prime Minister has much more power to resist disruptive elements in his party than an opposition leader has.

(The idea that the Westminster system is “cabinet government” comes from Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (1867). In his introduction to the 1963 edition, Richard Crossman argued that Bagehot’s characterisation was wrong, that the British system is “prime ministerial government”.)

The failure of Turnbull’s prime ministership was foreshadowed clearly in this article by Nicole Hasham: <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/malcolm-turnbull-concerned-about-asylum-seekers-on-manus-island-and-nauru-20150923-gjsxt2.html> (23 Sept. 2015, 8 days after becoming PM.)

Extracts: Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull says he is concerned about asylum seekers languishing in Australian-run detention centres on Nauru and Manus Island and hinted the government may consider acting to relieve their plight.... However Mr Turnbull said cabinet must be consulted before the government changes its policies on offshore processing... “[Changes] will be made by the minister, myself [and] the cabinet”... Mr Turnbull has repeatedly emphasised he will consult colleagues and maintain the traditions of a **true cabinet government** in his second stint as Liberal leader, **after the party voted him out of the job** in 2009 when the Coalition was in opposition.... It means the conservative flank of the party may restrain him from straying to the left on policies such as asylum seekers, climate change and gay marriage.