

ISSUE 1910

“In Support of Progress”

# Newsletter

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## The Federal Election

### *The Federal Election*

It seems such a long time ago that the government brought down its budget. We were “back on track, back in the black” (actually we weren’t, but maybe some time in the future...) and the Government said it was now able to provide tax cuts so that the individual punter could spend it. Which was all very well for those who pay a lot of tax. The Opposition had already released its policies, which basically concentrated on closing tax loopholes so that it could collect more money to spend more money – on services.

Soon after, and before the budget was passed into law, the election was called. So, it was to be an election fought over tax policy, around a budget not yet approved.

In the background, the Greens were promoting the idea that we should close down the coal industry to save the planet, which basically meant closing down the economy (see #1909), while Clive Palmer and Pauline Hanson were busy promoting an opposition to both major parties.

An initial foray by the majors into promoting their respective views of the world, led to some classic truisms:

“if you don’t like us, don’t vote for us”, and

“If you vote for us, you get me, but if you vote for them, then you get him”

Then Bill stumbled over his superannuation policy - no new taxes – while ScoMo was arguing that he led a united team, while speaking Mandarin to a Korean voter. Messy moments for both of them.

It was time for the apparatchiks to take over, and take over they did. So began a round of negative campaigning, based on focus group research, which basically means denigrating your opponent. We were confronted on the one hand with the line that “Bill was a liar”, while on the other hand, the Prime Minister was a “cutter”. It has now entered the realm of total falsehood, with “mediscare” and “death duties” leading the charge. Neither are true, and neither are believable.

Then we were exposed to the revelations that one MP was spending a lot of time in the Philippines because he was in love, and the beginnings of a scandal around water rights (monies being paid to a Cayman Islands registered company to which a present Minister was once connected, and the former Minister – Barnaby Joyce – losing his cool when confronted with some questions about it).

Park it with the Auditor-General – quick! “Nothing to see here.” Oh, really?

Parties started to steal the other’s policy positions. The Liberals argued that they were supportive of increased health funding, while Labor was concerned to not upset well-paid blue-collar workers with their tax reforms.

Into the mix came the Adani coal mine. Both parties want to be seen to be supportive of the mine in Queensland to attract Queensland voters, while appealing to voters in the southern states who believe the mine will be bad for the climate. The tax campaign was becoming the climate campaign.

## Hospitals

## UTas

## Mac Pt

And so we were led into a debate about electric vehicles and tradesmen's utes, which was a silly argument and quickly dropped.

However, the Greens proposed the argument that we should not count the cost of taking action on climate change, but the cost of not taking action. (NB The cost of not taking action is zero, but that is another story). Essentially a very nebulous argument, But, if we were to count the cost of doing so, then it is basically a bottomless pit, and totally unmeasurable as to its effectiveness. Still, it caused both major parties to stumble.

It was all getting very messy. A break was needed, and Easter provided it. Everyone chilled, while the cameras followed our leaders into their respective places of worship, showing them to be suitably devout at church services.

So, where to from here? George Megalogenis, in an insightful article (published in the Fairfax media April 11) noted the cultural divide bedevilling the country:

*"no party has been able to balance the 21<sup>st</sup> century interests and identities of the cities and the regions, of workers and retirees, of migrants and indigenous Australians on the one hand and white Australians on the other"*

He then proposed that neither leader has the capacity to reconnect old and new Australia, and that both are a product of an "apparatchik age", with no experience of a world outside of politics.

It is a rather damning indictment, and it certainly goes a long way to explain the confusion over climate and energy policy – a desire to please, rather than any position of principle.

It also goes a long way to explain the rise in support of the minor parties, more as a reactive protest vote against the majors (a pox on both their houses), rather than a proactive vote of support for the minors.

In Tasmania, three seats would appear to be up for grabs, and both the Prime Minister and his Deputy have spent some time in the north of the state, splashing around lots of money and even inspecting a carrot patch. "What's up, doc?" The Opposition leader is yet to appear, spending his time in more northern climes. It could be a fatal error for Labor if he doesn't show up soon.

So, the pressure is on both parties to get their act together sell their story strongly. To date, both have been mired in the shifting sand of policy positions (e.g. climate, energy) away from their core themes, and neither have yet found the solid ground to do so.

Me, I want to see positive politics in a campaign. Saying "We are less bad than the others" is not exactly a ringing endorsement of ones own position. I find in most cases negative campaigning to be counterproductive – it simply leads to mistrust and to unintended consequences, including rebound.

Climate is a classic case of tripping over oneself, and it could be the undoing of both of them. Yet I suspect the negative will outshine the positive. As will disenchantment!

### **Meanwhile, in the State of Tasmania:**

The Royal remains in crisis.

The Uni has decided to move into the CBD for reasons as yet unclear.

Mac Pt is doing what it has always done – not much, and

People are complaining bitterly about a lack of proper infrastructure

In other words, situation normal. Lets unpick these a bit.

## Hospitals

Once again, yet again, the medicos have come out and stated that the Royal is in crisis. The Emergency Department is overcrowded and staff are under enormous stress. The Minister in response has said that a meeting called for December will be brought forward to June. This was so obviously the wrong call, and the Speaker has now come out and lambasted the Minister for being so slow. Hold it now!

The Minister in a further response has said he will not be waiting for the meeting to "start working on solutions". Come on, Min., after all the commentary that has been made, over such a long time, you are only now starting to work on solutions? What on earth have you been doing up until now?

The question needs to be asked – why is the Royal suffering such a crisis? The answer, as the former head of the Emergency Department (ED), Bryan Walpole, wrote in an Opinion Piece on Wednesday does not lie in the ED itself, but in having available beds for people travelling through the ED.

So Minister, why is this so? You say that the opening of K bock will resolve the issue, but the medical fraternity say Not so. You parade the fact that you have provided 130 extra beds, and yet you still have the problem. The answer it seems lies in the fact that people are occupying beds that don't need to do so.

One presumes your hospital administrators have already told you that. So it is up to your hospital administrators to clear those beds. It may require a change in operating procedures, such as some medical services being provided on a 7-day basis, or working theatres beyond 5pm at night, or rehab beds being provided in a less intensive environment. That is their job, and you don't need to wait for a meeting in June to be told that. Or to act on it.

Blaming people for raising these legitimate concerns as fear-mongers is absurd, although it has become something of a mantra that you chant. Yet I suspect if the shoe was on the other foot, you would be leading the charge.

And if all that is too hard to grasp, Min., then the government has a real problem, and that is you!

## UTAS

The University has made a decision to move into the CBD from its Sandy Bay campus, and is buying up buildings in the CBD as fast as it can. Interestingly, it has overlooked the Macquarie Point site, and one can only imagine why.

The rationale for the decision to move into town remains unclear, although some have argued that the Uni will now be more accessible to students in the northern suburbs and the eastern shore. Maybe, but I suspect geography is being confused with aspiration and relevance. After all, the TAFE is in the CBD, and it has not been travelling well at all.

The decision is not without its critics, and that includes its own staff, who it would appear have not been consulted. Something of an oversight, to not engage with your own people?

What will it mean for the CBD, for traffic flow, parking etc.? Suggesting it will all be resolved by the provision of more public transport is simply burying one's head in the sand. Because as I have written in this newsletter many times, public transport is not the answer to Hobart's growing pains, and the move by the Uni will only exacerbate the problem.

To emphasise this point, and with the bus drivers on strike, traffic banks up with increasing frequency on the major arterials leading into the city, while the outer rim of the city continues to grow, and a new suburb is mooted for the Eastern Shore, which only means a further increase in traffic flows.

Regional Tasmania is also feeling the pinch of growing pains, with the pressures being placed on Bruny and Freycinet both attracting the ire of residents.

The government needs to articulate its plan for the provision of infrastructure to resolve these "bottlenecks" – a failure to do so will only lead to a loss of support.

Hopefully the federal campaign will free up sufficient federal funds to resolve some of these bottlenecks - carparks and ferries and toilet facilities for example, to commence flood mitigation works in flood-prone areas such as Latrobe and Huonville – I know, I have said all this before, but again hopefully, the state government is making the case to both the major political parties.

Question – how shovel-ready are we, if funds were made available?

### **Macquarie Point**

My dear friends at Macquarie Point are again in the news. Priding itself on having so many a-stakeholders to deal with, it has now drawn the ire of Hobart City councilors for a failure to allow for adequate provision of housing.

I thought that matter had been resolved such a longtime ago. Mac Pt was to be a public space, a gathering place, a reconciliation place, an Antarctic precinct etc etc. No room for private housing in that configuration, one would have thought. So someone has got that one wrong!

In the spirit of same, ie a community precinct, Dark MoFo has been able to utilise the site during its winter celebrations as its Dark Park over the last few years.

Alas, no longer. Dark MoFo has been told it can no longer access the site at that time. Something different is planned - a film set for a spooky and gothic mystery tv series – how apt that all seems.

Having told Dark MoFo to bummer off – how weird is that, considering it was MONA's vision for the site that got the project back on track - the management at Mac Point are now inviting the public to attend an Inaugural Open Day on May 25.

*Come and experience the fantastic community of tenants, businesses, neighbours and not-for-profit groups that make up the Mac Point site."*

Really? Experience them? This "entirely unique blend of people"? Hopefully we will be able to experience the vegie patch and the bicycle track to nowhere as well.

Meanwhile a clip on the website suggests something might happen on-site by the year 2022.

I wouldn't bank on it, not the way it has been going.