

WORKING TITLE: New taxes are not political death

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The ACT election result is further proof that Australian conservatives have a tin ear. Either that, or because they spend so much time telling voters scary stories about taxes and public debt that there is simply no time to listen to what the voters are really want.

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On Saturday night the ACT Labor government of Andrew Barr won an historic fifth term and the Liberal Opposition lost the support of another four percent of voters. This despite the fact that a 15 year old Labor Government was promising to collect more revenue via land tax and invest a lot of money in a new light rail network.

The Turnbull Government recently issued Australia's first 30 year bond, but the question for the PM is does he have a 30 year plan for Australia? If a week is a long time in politics then the term of a 30 year bond must seem like an eternity. But for most, such planning horizons are quite common.

In 30 years' time Australia's population will be [36 million](#), the vast majority of our electricity will be renewable and a child born today, having spent nearly 20 years in education, will be saving for a deposit to accompany their 30 year mortgage. Not only will today's 'big issues' like the ABCC be nothing more than old chip wrapping, but the metaphor of 'chip wrapping' will have vanished from our vernacular.

The ACT election highlights that governments can sell a positive long run agenda to improve communities and it shows that governments can even be honest about the need to fund ambitious investments in future proofing our cities via increased government revenue.

But the ACT election also highlights how short term and opportunistic our politics can be. Despite the fact that Malcolm Turnbull is an advocate for light rail such as that proposed by ACT Labor the PM neither publicly supported the ACT Tram nor criticised his local Liberal branch for brewing a political storm in a planning tea cup.

The PM also failed to commend the ACT Labor government for being the first to abolish stamp duty on the sale of houses and introduce the kind of land tax supported by most economists, and, as recently as last year, Mr Turnbull himself. Similarly, despite once suggesting that 100 percent renewable energy was inevitable, Mr Turnbull remained silent about the ACT Government's plans to source 100 per cent of its energy from renewable sources by 2020.

As the last three PMs discovered, changing the country is a lot harder than getting elected. John Howard, on the other hand, managed not just to change the country but to get himself elected four times. And while Australian politicians like to blame twitter for their current troubles, new technology has not stopped John Key from providing stable leadership in New Zealand since 2008.

A leader who wants to change the country needs to be consistent. While voters will forgive changes in priorities, as Mike Baird will soon realize, they are much slower to forgive changes in 'principle'. If Mr Turnbull really wants to see our cities transformed in the coming decades then he needs to support anyone proposing to do so rather than just wait around for state Liberals to propose the changes he says he so desires.

The same is true for tax reform, investing in renewable energy and preparing for the communication revolution racing our way. If Mr Turnbull wants to drive big changes in these areas, he needs to work consistently and reliably with whichever champions come along.

The ACT election shows that voters will support parties promising to tackle the problems they really worry about, like congestion, climate change and access to health. The ACT election also confirms the lesson of the Abbott government, large numbers of Liberal voters will desert the party if it offers nothing more than criticism of everyone else.

Malcolm Turnbull doesn't have a tin ear, but we are yet to see if he has a brave heart. The PM knows that voters want liveable cities, clean energy and high quality services and his new 30 year bonds give him an obvious way to fund them. The ACT election reflects poorly on both the local Liberals and the PM's credibility. It's not too late for the 'real Malcolm' to stand up, but it will be soon. 30 years will fly by.

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