

AUSTRALIA: We have had great news in Australia! A cloud has lifted. Tony Abbott was thrown out in a surprise coup and Malcolm Turnbull is our new Prime Minister.

In his challenge for the leadership Turnbull said Abbott “has not been capable of providing the economic leadership the nation requires”. Abbott was very unpopular - he broke election promises, tried to inflict hard right ideological and unfair policies, and was inept and gaffe prone. His world view was very out of date, like another dinosaur, Stephen Harper in Canada who has also just been thrown out. Harper has been replaced as PM by the refreshing Justin Trudeau.

In *The Saturday Paper* editorial Abbott was described as the “worst prime minister ever”. See – it wasn’t just me!

People lament we have had five prime ministers in five years – they all deserved to go! It is not helpful for good and stable government however. Although I don’t ever vote for the present Coalition government and dislike or disagree with many of their policies, Malcolm Turnbull is moderate and modern. He is very articulate and wants to discuss issues – preferring “advocacy” over the inane 3 word slogans of his predecessor. Turnbull, who is much more sophisticated than most of the other parliamentarians, changed the adversarial discourse and tone of parliament immediately. He talks of having confidence, optimism, and the “agility” to take the opportunities presented by changing economic circumstances and technological advances.

Turnbull has had a highly successful career as a lawyer and business man. As a moderate, he is ironically more popular with people on the left of politics than he is with the right wing of his own party and Coalition partner. This sometimes Tea Party fringe hate him and are suspicious of his *dangerous* ideas – like real action on climate change, same-sex marriage and Australia becoming a republic.

One of many policies I disagree with is the very recent decision to permit the huge Adani coal mine in Queensland to go ahead. Development would also further endanger the Great Barrier Reef as port facilities will have to be expanded by dredging. Many believe coal mines will be “stranded assets”, and several banks have refused to finance it. For those that say coal is essential for the poor in India, many people in the country are off the grid, and domestic solar panels with battery storage is a much more viable option.

This is just one of many tests for Turnbull, and the mine going ahead is not a good look for him to take to the Paris Climate Conference next month. Already the Australian Conservation Foundation has called for a Peoples Climate March. In Sydney we meet at 1.pm 29th November in The Domain.

Some say Turnbull has promised his Coalition partner the Nationals not to introduce an emissions trading scheme for TWO terms, and he will have to stick to the government’s widely-criticised Direct Action scheme which pays polluters with taxpayers money! This is a much more ineffective scheme that many predict will not reach stated targets.

All the shock jocks here like Allan Jones and Ray Hadley etc, and the Murdoch journalists that besmirched their reputations as cheer leaders for the incompetent Abbott, are scrambling to adjust to the more enlightened and reasonable post - Abbott era. They too dislike the moderate Turnbull, but of course hate the Left much more, so they are rather wedged.

The Opposition ALP were caught unprepared and Abbott would have been a much easier target in the election due next year. They will now really have to perform. I'm reading David Marr's *Faction Man* in the Quarterly Essay on the ALP leader Bill Shorten. I think Shorten remains enigmatic but not to be written off. He is ambitious, determined and intelligent and rose quickly through trade union ranks as a brilliant recruiter, salesman and negotiator. He is a very effective back room operator who may - or who may not - work out a more engaging public persona. He is very unpopular in the polls and he may still be very damaged by the Royal Commission into Trade Unions. It is no surprise some union corruption and thuggery has been exposed. However, the unions have a great history on behalf of workers and there have been recent scandals of worker exploitation. Only about 17% of the workforce is unionised these days, and they do have a disproportionate influence on the ALP, and make up a disproportionate number of parliamentarians.

Malcolm Turnbull is at present hugely popular – the most recent poll had him at 68%. Ironically he is more popular with many people who are more left of centre, than he is with the conservative elements within his party and constituents. He has to manage this “civil war” and the repercussions from the coup, like having Abbott, ungracious to the end, now sitting on the back-bench sulking beside other demoted cabinet ministers.

So I'm very pleased. A much more sensible person is now running the country who will hopefully modify the unfairest policies, and if Turnbull fails, a rejuvenated Labor Party will win. Turnbull did seem destined to become Prime Minister (despite an early stumble as leader when in Opposition a few years ago), and some predict he will be in power for a long time. Like all leaders he faces many challenges, especially here with the economy and the end of our resources boom.