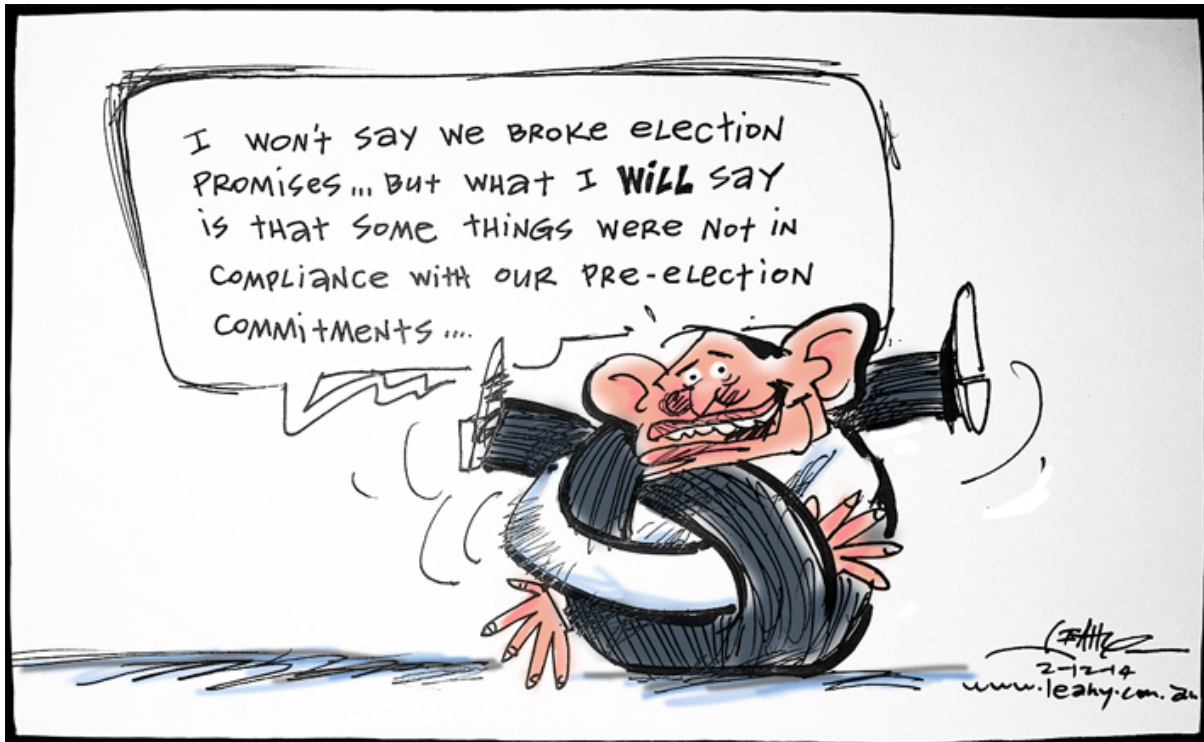




polling evidence backs up these issues as in the Queensland mainstream of electorate concerns in this campaign.

Professor Colleen Lewis of Monash University has interpreted these results as suggesting that voters are becoming less trusting of politicians in general, partly in response to the demonstrated failure on both sides to keep promises made before elections. This cynicism is magnified in the current environment, both locally in Queensland and with the Abbott Government in Canberra, by perceptions of hypocrisy. One side which deplored the conduct of its opponents, their negativity as well as a major broken promise, then proceeded on winning office to do exactly the same thing – without apology.



### Abbott's Mea Culpa<sup>3</sup>

As Lewis puts it:

When you look at trust measurements that go on with polling, people say they are less and less trusting of their politicians and there is a variety of reasons for this. ... Broken promises is one, especially if they are made the night before an election, broken shortly after and the person breaking the promise does not admit that they have done it.

Lewis argues that it was acceptable to break promises when circumstances changed and these circumstances could be explained. This issue of broken promises takes me back to major concerns of political philosophers – should we expect political leaders to live by a moral code based on trust?

In July 2014 the *New York Review of Books*, under the title 'The Case against Moralism' Samuel Freeman reviewed the writing of Bernard Williams.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Cartoon reproduced courtesy of artist Sean Leahy.

<sup>4</sup> Bernard Williams, **Essays and Reviews, 1959-2002** (with a foreword by Michael Wood), Princeton University Press, 2014.,

Freeman identified one category of morality as ‘consequentialism’:

Actions are right to the degree that they promote good consequences; our duty (and that of our leaders) is to take measures that create the greatest overall good.

The alternative was more concerned with the need for individuals to accept moral constraints on the pursuit of their own purposes:

In pursuing our ends, we ought always to act in conformity with rules that reasonable people can endorse as universal laws that everyone complies with.

Queensland readers will immediately recognise echoes of the concerns expressed by members of the judiciary and the wider legal profession about the presumed rules that should appropriately apply in the appointment of magistrates and judges.

Can the controversial appointment of a Chief Justice be validated on the grounds that it promoted good consequences? Or were our political leaders entitled to ignore the general perception about what constituted universal laws just because they were not written down as formal constraints?

Williams argued that neither of these issues mattered - that there was no impartial perspective for judging morality – that everything depended on the personal perspective of the individuals who were free to pursue personal ‘projects’. Individuals, including political leaders, were morally unconstrained if their sense of purpose overrides their concern about observing what other members of society might regard as reasonable limitations.

Williams identified this as ‘political realism’. For him, this was the only sensible way of thinking about the morality of leaders – following Thomas Hobbes, he saw that there was a minimal requirement of maintaining order and protection but not necessarily mutual trust.

Many of us, of different faiths or no faith at all, would beg to differ. It is a key question at the heart of modern political ideology.

Do we want to be able to trust our leaders?