

## **Conservatives as bastions of stability: Boris, Farage and Trump**

**Ann Scott<sup>1</sup>**

Malcolm Turnbull and the LNP are trying to make the case that only they can offer the stability that Australia needs during the international turmoil that has resulted from the Brexit referendum vote.

This seems a weird claim from a conservative party leader if you examine the recent history of the fractured Republican Party in the USA and the fracturing of the Conservative Party in the UK. Brexit demonstrates the political volatility within the conservative parties. '[Brexit stands as a warning to American conservatives](#)' wrote Matt Laslo in *The Guardian* immediately after the referendum. It should stand as a warning that the thin paper over the divisions in the LNP may not survive long after the election.

The hard right of the LNP will be buoyed by the success of their ideas as they watch Donald Trump and Nigel Farage turning the western democracies into chaos. If Turnbull is returned as Prime Minister he will be even more hostage to the people who have prevented him from implementing the agenda he professed when he succeeded Tony Abbott.

There has already been ample evidence in Australia of the fracturing of the LNP between the centre and the far right forces. Tony Abbott was replaced by Malcolm Turnbull because the electorate rapidly became disenchanted by his rhetoric and hard-line insensitivity to social inequality. The voters were shocked at the punitive measures in Abbott's first budget in 2014. It became obvious that nothing was going to be done to address the increasing divide between the privileged and the strugglers.

Malcolm Turnbull took over late last year with a promise to respond to the more progressive elements in the party, offering a civilised, rational debate. However, in order to get the numbers against Abbott, Turnbull was politically hand-cuffed by the right wing. Most of the right appear to have been muzzled during the election campaign except on the issue of a plebiscite on gay marriage which Turnbull himself had disowned. Offering the smallest of small targets has been the strategy of the LNP, with candidates avoiding public debates in which they can't control the agenda.

### **The US 'Grand Old Party' fractured by Donald Trump**

The ABC has reported that since Brexit, while on a conveniently-timed visit to Scotland, [Trump has met with Rupert Murdoch](#). Trump is a highly divisive figure within his party which, as [the ABC reports](#), is imploding as his campaign marches on (though his polls are now falling):

'Mr Trump is facing an increasing internal Republican revolt with prominent long-standing members of the party speaking out against his candidacy.

'Influential conservative columnist George Will said he is leaving the Republican Party over Mr Trump's polarising campaign and urged others to follow suit, even if it means rival Democrats take the White House.

---

<sup>1</sup> Adjunct Professor Ann Scott is Executive Editor of the TJRyan Foundation.

'Mr Will, a Washington Post columnist, told a luncheon Friday: "This is not my party," according to the conservative PJ Media news website.

'Henry Paulson, a Republican who was US Treasury secretary during the 2008 financial meltdown, on Friday called a Trump presidency "unthinkable" and said he will vote for Democrat Hillary Clinton.

"When it comes to the presidency, I will not vote for Donald Trump," Mr Paulson, who was chief executive of Goldman Sachs before becoming Treasury chief under Republican President George W Bush, wrote in an opinion piece in the Washington Post.

"I'll be voting for Hillary Clinton, with the hope that she can bring Americans together to do the things necessary to strengthen our economy, our environment and our place in the world.'

### **The UK Conservative Party shattered by Farage's UKIP**

David Cameron took leadership of the Tory Party in 2005 with the stated aim of modernising the Conservatives:

He was a young leader who helped to soften the party's image and went on to become the UK's youngest prime minister in more than 200 years. Although he led the Conservative Party to government in 2010, he had to form a coalition with the Liberal Democrats, the first since World War II.

That same year, Nigel Farage announced he would stand again as leader of the right-wing, anti-immigration UK Independence Party (UKIP).

The steady rise of Mr Farage and his party spooked the Conservatives, and in 2013 Mr Cameron was struggling to lead a fiercely divided party.

[He committed to a referendum, and effectively threw the hot potato down the track.](#)

But it was never a short-term political solution for Mr Cameron, it was an attempt to once and for all address a fundamental problem his Conservative Party had with the Europe project. Famously he criticised fellow Tories for "banging on about Europe". This was his historic chance to settle the matter, at least for a generation. As he announced the referendum, he referred to the character of his island nation: "Independent, forthright, passionate in defence of our sovereignty."

Even so, few at that time confidently predicted the Europhobic forces would trump the status quo.