

ISSUE 2311

# "In Support of Progress" Newsletter

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## The circus cont.

### *A real live circus*

Well well well!, The circus really HAS come to town!

Not to be outdone by their federal leader's budget response on Thursday, two state Liberal MP's decided to announce that they were leaving – not only the Parliamentary Liberal Party, but the Party altogether! No warning, no buildup. Friday morning was the start of it, and the end of it.

Now that is some step! More a giant leap.

Fellow Liberal the federal member for Bass Bridget Archer has often voted against her party's position on matters, but she remains within the party – for now anyway. So to leave the party altogether – that is quite something!

They advised they were leaving because of a lack of transparency in government decisions (specifically the stadium and the Bass Strait cable Mariner), and an overall lack of consultation. "We have been ignored, overlooked". The action they have taken is extraordinary, as is the timing. Just before a budget – the situation has obviously been brewing for some time, and they are obviously mightily pissed-off!

The two ex's are John Tucker and Lara Alexander. They advised they would not initiate any motion of no-confidence, although one, Ms. Alexander, did not rule out supporting a no -confidence motion, and a more recent comment by her, stating that the Premier's approach was "not just foolhardy but morally bankrupt", would suggest that nothing is certain here. Them's fighting words! Who knows which way the wind will blow?

They will now sit on the cross bench, together with an independent, two Greens, and one Labor exile. Six in all. It is becoming quite crowded there!

The Liberals are now a minority government. No longer the idle and arrogant boast of a "strong stable majority liberal government". And no longer the claim that "the other side is just a rabble". Out of a total of 13 Members, six MP's have now resigned or moved to the cross bench. Hefty losses. The government will now need to re-assess its brand. It has suffered significant damage. It tends to come with arrogance, an aftermath such as this!

This was the jewel in the Liberal Crown, the last remaining Liberal government in the country. With the party throughout the country tearing itself apart the Tasmanian mob were seen as the last hope – now that has also gone, since they have determined what's good for their Party in the rest of the country is good enough for them also.

Every electorate now has a Liberal casualty, or question mark. John Tucker is an MP for Lyons. He was elected in his own right at the last election. Lara Alexander is an MP for Bass, and entered parliament on a countback when Sarah Courtney resigned. (She is one of two Bass Liberals who have entered parliament thus, the other being Simon Wood when Peter Gutwein resigned). For the record, Braddon saw the resignation of Adam Brooks and Franklin saw the resignation of Jackie Petrusma. A question mark remains over Madeleine Ogilvie in Clark)

So, that is what happened. What to make of it all?

For the two members, they will be seen as either pariahs who have let down their team, or saviours acting on the basis of principle. Putting the government at risk or saving the state. It depends on your point of view. Both have merit.

For the government, now in minority, every day will now be a difficult day. It will need to fend off motions of no-confidence in the parliament. Not just once, all the time. It will soon be bringing down a budget, and no question, it will not be a budget for all seasons. Criticisms (on housing, education, health, not to mention the stadium.) will be front and centre, Nothing surer.

Under pressure internally, under pressure in parliament, under pressure from a hostile electorate, it would be tempting for them to clear the air and go to an election.

To do so means it would be the government's call, and not the call of others who could bring them down on the floor of parliament. The only difficulty with that is they could well lose. Still, just limping on, frayed and paralysed, they could lose by more. Whether they might wish to cut and run - to "save the furniture" - remains a live option for them. Which is the better option? That is one helluva call - the least bad option. It's a matter of judgement.

The two members have complained about the lack of transparency in the government's dealings over the stadium and the football licence. It's a fair call. No-one it seems knows the full details of the deal or the ramifications if things go awry. The claim that there is some commercial-in-confidence situation here might be a convenient argument, but it is a nonsense argument. Who exactly is it protecting? The AFL? Surely not.

One of the two has taken this argument further and mentioned the Marinus project as also coming within the realm of a "secret deal". Interesting call. He could have a case. He should now spell out exactly what part of the Marinus project is of concern. The cost? The benefit? Having taken it this far he might as well take it all the way.

The two say they will remain in parliament. Having left the party there is a real case to say they should resign from parliament altogether, as this is not what the electors voted for. One might raise it, but it is not going to happen - it never does. However, they do have a duty of care to ensure the committee work of parliament is not disrupted, and should be willing to continue to serve on them.

Would a new leader be able to entice them back into the fold? Given that they have left the Party, I doubt it. Even if they wanted to, the Party would not reward such behaviour. That door is closed!

It does leave open to speculation the question whether the remaining members have also become disenchanted that they would move to "roll the Rock". At a time when they need what little stability they have left, such a move would be madness, in my view!

Will the two re-contest their seats at the next election? Maybe they will, arguing that their principles override any party loyalty. It would be a big call for them to be re-elected, however the electorate is in a feisty mood, and they could well garner a lot of support. And they would be helped by the fact that the quota for election will be reduced (to 12.5%) due to there being 7 members (presently 5) to be elected in each electorate. Watch this space!

The two backbenchers have, according to them, been treated very badly - basically ignored. There is a big lesson here. If you don't take people with you, they will end up being against you! Better to listen, understand and deal with any problem, rather than ignoring it.

OK, so here does that leave the stadium?

Recent comments by entertainment promoter Charles Touber should be a wake-up call (*Mercury 12 May*). There is now widespread concern about the project itself, and not only the way it has been handled. This concern has morphed into a popular uprising against the government and the project, and irrespective of what deal(s) might have been written down on secret pieces of paper, the project will not – cannot – now proceed.

It has become too divisive an issue. It will possibly bring down a government, and no alternate government would tread again down this path.

The lobby groups who have until now dismissed with arrogance the concerns of the people (calling them naysayers) have assisted in creating this divide. And they continue to do so, calling on MP's to stand by the stadium project. By so doing they have lost the play. Maybe they should learn to count – the numbers are just not there. It seems likely they have also brought down the government.

So has the AFL! The recent comments from the AFL CEO on Melbourne radio show a total disregard for the mayhem this has now caused, washing his hands of any repercussions for the "hand that signed the paper". The insistence of a stadium at Mac Pt, which really has nothing to do with whether there should be a Tassie team in the competition, says heaps about the ridiculous macho approach on display.

The problem has always been that two arguments have been conflated, the desire for an AFL team on the one hand and the open-ended requirement for a new stadium on the other. As much as folk might wish otherwise, the case for the 19<sup>th</sup> licence needs to stand on its own merits.

The challenge for government of either persuasion will be to ensure that the argument for the team can be separated from the argument for the stadium.

So, here is the big sell.

If \$130 million is to be spent on upgrading York Park, in Launceston, (not a small sum), then let us ask the question WHY? Why is such an amount being spent there – for what purpose? Presumably football will be played there.

So, one argument for breaking the current impasse is to argue for the AFL team to be housed there.

The tourism sector and the hospitality sector presumably represent interests around the whole state and could not possibly be against it because it will still bring tourists into Tasmania. The construction sector is already overheated, and will remain so while housing pressures remain, and would surely welcome the \$130 million spend. *The Mercury* newspaper, nothing if not the greatest proponent for the 19<sup>th</sup> team, would not argue against it because the state-wide interest is being served, and the Mac Pt site would remain available for a more suitable urban renewal" development, presumably still with \$240 million of federal money.

Now you might say – "and pigs might fly", but, after you have stopped laughing, then ask yourself – why not? After all, all parties get what they want.

It's a WIN WIN. The alternative is a LOSE LOSE.

So far, the clowns are running the circus, and all attention has been focused on them.

While this parody of good governance continues, there remain the homeless, the waiting lists, difficulties in the health space, staffing issues at TAFE. power prices, mortgage stress etc etc etc.

These are serious matters, they raise issues and they require answers, and action.