



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE:
TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS

Labor Party Leadership

SPEECH

Thursday, 27 June 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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Questioner
Speaker Brandis, Sen George

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Senator BRANDIS (Queensland—Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (15:13): For those who are students of history, the events of the last 24 hours—extraordinary and spectacular events—constitute the greatest political collapse of a government in Australian federal political history. There have been times of turbulence on both sides of politics because that is in the nature of politics, but never before, in 112 years, has an incumbent government so comprehensibly collapsed.

With the announcement about half an hour ago of Mr Stephen Smith that he would not be recontesting the election and would be leaving the cabinet, we have had in the last 24 hours the resignation from the cabinet of no fewer than eight of the 22 members of cabinet—more than a third. That has never happened on either side of Australian politics before. That fact alone tells you how unprecedented is the turmoil that has beset the Australian government.

The sad reality is—and it is an ugly sight on display for all Australians to see on their television news and current affairs shows—that the political party that constitutes the government of Australia at the moment, the Australian Labor Party, is deeply riven by the most poisonous personal hatreds and antagonisms that we have ever seen on either side of Australian politics. And that is not just me saying that; that is what they say about themselves.

We have lost eight of the 22 cabinet ministers overnight. But what I want to know—and this was the point of the questions that I and my colleagues asked of Senator Wong—is: what of some of those who are saying and who have in the past expressed their contempt for and lack of confidence in Kevin Rudd, starting with Senator Penny Wong herself, who said that she did not consider that he was the right person or had the right temperament to be the Prime Minister of Australia? Yet not only does she continue to sit in his cabinet but she has been one of the beneficiaries of this political upheaval, because she has become the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

What about Mr Gary Gray, the Minister for Resources and Energy? This is what Mr Gary Gray said about Kevin Rudd only last week:

He doesn't have the courage and the strength that's required to do this job. What he can do is spread confusion.

How can you have a government when one of the senior members of it, who continues to sit in the cabinet, not six days ago described the new Prime Minister as a man without the courage and the strength that is required for the job of Prime Minister?

What about Mr Tony Burke, who continues to sit in the cabinet and who last year described the first period of the Rudd government in these words:

The stories that were around of the chaos, of the temperament, of the inability to have decisions made—they are not stories.

That is what Mr Tony Burke said about Mr Kevin Rudd. Yet Mr Tony Burke continues to sit in his cabinet.

Then there is Mr Brendan O'Connor, who last year said this about the 2010 election campaign, speaking about Mr Kevin Rudd:

... there had been 'unbelievable' leaks during the 2010 election campaign against Ms Gillard and hence the Labor party.

That is unprecedented in Labor's history, that we would have leaks coming out of cabinet to target the then-prime minister during an election campaign, to aid and abet Tony Abbott to win the 2010 election. That destabilisation, that treachery has gone on now for varying degrees for the last 18 months.

And he was talking about Mr Kevin Rudd.

Eight of the 22 members of the cabinet have resigned and refused to serve. They would rather sit on the backbench or go into retirement than serve with Kevin Rudd. And there are at least another four who do not have the moral courage to do what the others did and resign, and who are on the record saying that they have no trust or confidence in this man.