

Tony Abbott to become Australian Liberal Party president in further lurch to right

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Former Prime Minister Tony Abbott will be elected as the new federal president of the Liberal Party at a meeting tomorrow, having nominated for the position unopposed.

The ascension of Abbott, and the fact that there is no challenge to his candidacy, is the latest expression of a sharp shift to the right by the Liberal Party.

It signals that increasingly dominant sections of the Liberals, and their backers in the ruling class, are intent on transforming the party into some form of far-right outfit in line with the rise of figures such as Donald Trump in the US and Nigel Farage in the UK.

That is a response to a crisis of the Liberals that has only deepened in the year since its wipeout at the May 2025 federal election. The Liberal primary vote plunged to its lowest level since the party was formed in 1944 and it retained just nine of 88 metropolitan seats.

In the South Australian election last April, and in a by-election for the federal seat of Farrer in southwest New South Wales (NSW) earlier this month, Liberal results were even worse. This is an existential crisis for the traditional urban party of the ruling elite, stemming from the collapse of its erstwhile base in a relatively large middle class which no longer exists after decades of social polarisation.

As significant as their own record-low primary votes in those elections was the fact that, in South Australia and even more dramatically in Farrer, the Liberals were decisively outpolled by the anti-immigrant One Nation party. One Nation secured more than 22 percent of the primary in South Australia. The seat of Farrer was taken by One Nation, with almost 40 percent of the vote compared to the Liberals' 12.4 percent.

The results confirmed polling over the past six months indicating a rise of One Nation. Given that confirmation of previous predictions, the Liberals are undoubtedly watching the most recent polling with something approaching terror.

Redbridge polling, conducted in May and reported this week in the *Australian Financial Review*, indicated that if a federal election were held, One Nation could win as many as 59 seats.

While that was the upper prediction of One Nation gains, the median was for it to gain 53 seats and for the Coalition, comprising the Liberals and the regional-based Nationals, to retain just 12 seats.

Polling is inherently limited and speculative. But whatever comes to pass, the figures point to a seismic shift that is underway, with the Coalition threatened to be reduced to the status of a minor party, One Nation becoming the official parliamentary opposition and senior Liberal shadow ministers, including party leader Angus Taylor, potentially losing their seats.

One Nation has benefited from the reactionary climate whipped up by the major parties, including the Labor government, based on the scapegoating and persecution of immigrants and refugees and far-reaching attacks on political opposition, particularly the mass movement against the Israeli genocide in Gaza. It has been able to tap into widespread discontent with the major parties, amid the social and cost-of-living crisis.

One Nation's electoral gains thus far have above all been a result of the historic breakdown of the Liberals, which is the sharpest expression of a crisis of the two-party system. Having been the beneficiary of that crisis, One Nation is increasingly setting the terms of official political discussion, with the major parties competing with it in a lurch to the right.

That is the perspective that Abbott represents. While media coverage of his candidacy for the Liberal Party presidency has described it as Abbott's return to political office, in reality he never left politics after losing his parliamentary seat in 2019. The position of president will only formalise what has been an increasingly decisive de facto role in shaping the Liberals' direction.

Abbott is a far-right figure, who continually agitates in favour of revering "Western civilisation" against any, even nominal, recognition of the oppression of Indigenous people and for sharper attacks on immigrants, welfare recipients and other vulnerable sections of the working class.

He has continued to collaborate closely with his former

chief of staff and political advisor, Peta Credlin, who is a prominent commentator in the Murdoch media stable. Credlin has written scores of articles, raising that the crisis of the Liberals can only be overcome through a more explicit right-wing pitch, echoing that advanced by Trump and other fascist figures internationally.

Abbott has sought to enact that agenda. In February, he played a key role in the ouster of Sussan Ley as Liberal leader and the installation of Angus Taylor. Ley, who had been installed following the May election debacle, desperately sought to maintain an equilibrium between “moderate” Liberal MPs and more far-right forces, while repeatedly capitulating to the latter.

As the unviability of that balancing act became more and more clear, Abbott brokered an agreement between the conservative Liberal factions to unite behind Taylor and so to oust Ley.

In his reply to the Labor government’s budget this month, Taylor delivered a frothing right-wing diatribe against immigrants that was straight from the One Nation playbook. Taylor issued thinly-veiled racist dogwhistles about foreigners coming to Australia to access welfare and failing to assimilate the country’s supposed “values,” while thundering that a Liberal government would institute “one of the largest cuts” to migration in history.

Abbott publicly praised the remarks and declared them to be the direction that the Liberals should take. There are signs, however, that Abbott’s political ambitions extend beyond the party presidency, with a Liberal source telling the *Saturday Paper* earlier this month that he never reconciled himself to being ejected from parliament and may be preparing a campaign to return.

Some former leading Liberal figures have warned that Abbott’s presidency and the perspective he is advancing will only hasten the party’s demise. They promoted former Foreign Minister Alexander Downer as a challenger for the presidency, but in an indication of the extent to which the “moderate” wing of the party has already been wiped out, he withdrew well before the ballot because he would not have been in contention.

Such figures have pointed to Abbott’s role in the 2025 election defeat. He and Credlin were central to the campaign that was run by then Liberal leader Peter Dutton, which included several Trump-style talking points, such as a pledge for massive job cuts to the public sector, references by a couple of leading MPs to “making Australia great again” and a pledge to develop a domestic nuclear power industry.

The Liberals suffered a massive defeat, not because of a groundswell of support for Labor, whose primary vote was near record-low levels, but because of a mass repudiation of Trumpism, associated in popular consciousness with trade

war and military aggression and attacks on democratic rights.

Now, however, in a bid to stem their crisis, the Liberals are doubling down on that very program that was massively repudiated. The “moderate” figures have warned that such a pitch will never enable the Liberals to regain the seats they have lost in the wealthier suburbs of capital cities to “Teal” independents, who combine right-wing free-market policies with genuflections to concerns over the environment.

The attempt of the Liberals to compete with One Nation, moreover, is hampered by an inherent contradiction. One Nation has been able to win support by denouncing the major parties and fraudulently posturing as an opponent of the political establishment. The Liberals cannot present themselves as political outsiders in the same manner, because they are a core component of that very two-party system.

The lurch to the right will not lessen the crisis of the two-party system but will only deepen it. All of the parliamentary formations are trying to stem a crisis that results from massive social hardship and social polarisation that are intractable under capitalism.

At the same time, whatever their tactical differences, they are united on a militarist and austerity program that will only deepen that hardship.

That program is currently being imposed by the Labor government, exemplified by its budget which slashed \$63.8 billion from social programs over the next four years, including a massive assault on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and further cuts to the crisis-ridden public education and health sectors. At the same time, Labor has increased military spending to record levels of \$60 billion a year, as it participates in criminal US-led wars, such as the illegal onslaught against Iran, and prepares for even greater crimes, including plans for a catastrophic offensive against China.

The fight against this program of reaction and against the far right can only be waged by building a political movement of the working class which is independent from the entire political establishment, and which counterposes to capitalism in its breakdown a socialist perspective for the reorganisation of social and economic life from top to bottom.



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