

Slim pickings for libertarians

Written by The Punch | Nigel Bowen
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Whoever loses tomorrow, one thing is certain – this election will not be a victory for any major political party's true believers. Coalition and Labor partisans have spent the last month gulping down political-DNA-corroding Kool-Aid in their increasingly desperate attempts to pimp themselves out to disengaged bogans address the legitimate concerns of those salt-of-the-earth, hearts-of-gold, marginal-seat-dwelling, mainstream Australians who embody all that is pure and noble in this great nation.

How many inner-city ALP activists letterboxing on cold winter nights have been haunted by that image of the PM and Member for Lindsay scanning the horizon on a navy vessel off Darwin, looking as if they might at any moment rush to a gun turret to strafe an incoming boat packed to the gunwales with queue-jumping reffos? And how many small-business owners brooding about a recalcitrant employee have spluttered on their Penfolds Grange at a Liberal fundraising dinner, pondering how the party of capital lost its bottle when it came to smashing the unions?

But let's also spare a thought for the Greens' disillusioned libertarian voters. It was always a somewhat awkward embrace, but for years those bridling at the interference of church and state into who they marry, what they watch, how they choose to get intoxicated, or when they die felt the Greens had their backs.

Now, as even the most casual observer of politics is likely to have deduced from the dearth of 'BOB BROWN TO SET UP FREE HEROIN DISPENSARY AT GATES OF CATHOLIC GIRLS SCHOOL' headlines during this campaign, the Greens have tiptoed away from what, in the good old days, used to be invariably described as their 'radical social policies'. Indeed Dr Clive Hamilton, who contested the Higgins by-election for the Greens last year, is amongst the nation's most vociferous and erudite critics of libertarianism.

So where do those disillusioned with the social conservatism of the major parties who used to vote Green go now? In some seats at least, they have two choices come Saturday: the Secular Party or the Australian Sex Party. The former seems to have little chance of having any impact, the latter just might. Formed by longtime lobbyists for Australia's adult industry, Robbie Swan and Fiona Patten, the Sex Party has had sufficient funds to mount a reasonably professional campaign and has fielded several candidates – notably comedian Austen Tayshus, running against Tony Abbott in the seat of Warringah – colourful enough to generate media attention.

Very few voters would embrace the Australian Sex Party's policy platform — minimal censorship, unambiguously legal abortion, drug decriminalisation, support for euthanasia and gay marriage — in its entirety. But many voters, from across the political spectrum, are likely to find themselves supporting at least one of its policies with the kind of passion they've long since ceased to experience in relation to the big parties.

Swan was encouraged to form what became the Australian Sex Party by his friend Don Chipp, shortly before the anti-censorship campaigner died in 2006. Swan says Chipp, who founded the Democrats after finding himself too liberal for the Liberals, told him: "I know you want to start a political party, and the Democrats have had it, so you should do your own thing. I'll give you a few words of advice. The first thing you've gotta give it a name that no-one forgets. And make

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sure to stay true to your core issues, which are censorship and personal freedom. In the years ahead, Labor and Liberal will desert that whole area because they're being increasingly infiltrated by church and morals groups and the Greens will probably go the same way as they get bigger and start to take on those kind of trappings. For the next twenty years Australia is going to need a really strong civil liberties party."

A party that stays true to its core issues? The Australian Sex Party's backroom boys really should run that past a focus group of swinging voters out in marginal seat-land to see if there's any chance it could fly.

Nigel Bowen is writing an article on the Australian Sex Party's campaign, to be published in the October-November edition of GQ.

Source: [The Punch](#)