

Comment by Michael C H Jones

Barring a monumental and seismic shift in the mood of the Australian electorate, or an August 2001 John Howard "Tampa" event for Gillard, Tony Abbott will be Prime Minister by mid 2013 and likely to be so for at least a decade - three electoral victories. With the ALP as a completely shattered Opposition, hopefully not akin to the telephone box of Labor MPs in the Queensland State Parliament, only the Greens in the Senate are likely to be any real opposition to his policies - and both the Liberals and Labor have already started to target the Greens concerning preferences. An interesting side-issue will be where the loyalties will go of the decimated Labor voting hardcore - to the NSW ALP Right machine types with their trade union 'overlords' or the middle class tertiary educated global aspirants dominant faction of the Greens.

But Abbott for several parliamentary terms is likely to be invincible. And he is not a man to dilly-dally and waste time with his policy programmes most of which are yet to be released. However his remarks in China actually gives some indications that not only Labor and Greens voters will be shocked if not appalled. Will he be a John Howard clone - not likely. Abbott believes passionately in the Anglo-sphere, the Churchillian conviction of the role of the English speaking peoples, and in a far more fundamentalist way than the essentially pragmatic and worldly cynical Howard. You also have to understand the influence of Abbott's other mentor - Catholic Christian Bob Santamaria - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B._A._Santamaria - and I do not have the space nor time for a book.

In this context, as with so many others, the return of "godless" China with its Leninist structures glossing 'democracy and capitalism/socialism with Chinese characteristics' confronts Abbott with his ultimate challenge. Even if US President Obama wins a second term he retires at the end of 2016. The new leadership of China's CPC Standing Committee of the Politburo - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politburo_Standing_Committee_of_the_Communist_Party_of_China - with Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang at its head will last ten years - 2012-22. Therefore Abbott could still be Australian Prime Minister emulating John Howard if not Bob Menzies. Abbott will be 55 in November 2012 - Howard on becoming PM in March 1996 was 56 and lasted until December 2007.

So what does this mean for Australia domestic and Australia in its region no matter how defined? Firstly that the Progressive political forces will have to learn to live with Abbott and his 'take no prisoners' Second World War German Panza Division style. Secondly that even if Rudd returns to ALP Federal Leader, it will be not to win the Election but to complete the transformation of the Labor Party from a trade union dominated organisation - 5-10% of the voters (trade union members) cannot continue to command 50% of the votes at ALP Conferences across the country - this could mean another of Labor's historical bloodbaths/splits. Thirdly apart from Howard in Abbott's early years the South Australian connection will have influence - Nick Minchin domestically and Alexander Downer internationally. Self reliance, productivity and flexibility in the workforce - Industrial Relations - will be a top priority. And I predict a greater equality for Australia in US-Australia International Relations. But will this be sufficient to pacify the Chinese and their global ambitions? The China Seas may have to be sacrificed with all that means for Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam and the Philippines. But the line could be drawn at the Indonesian Straits if ASEAN economic stability can be maintained and India's influence correctly husbanded. Probably it will all depend on US leadership post Obama from 2017.

Domestically Australia will be economically integrated into the Indauspac Maritime Economic Community with our resources customers diversified away from China to India and Indonesia at least. Our manufacturing industries will continue to be "hollowed out" with perhaps a major contraction in the Car Industry with the consequent impact on technology and research infrastructure. As with

everything our population size in the context of global supply chains will be Australia's continuing challenge. On the other hand our national governance domain, which includes significant claims to surrounding oceans, will heighten the problems of border protection. If US protection deminished, and China's enticements were not considered appealing, then would Australia like India consider going nuclear?

There is one certainty. Australia, already a different place since Tiannanmen Square Beijing in June 1989 and then 9/11 in New York, will face even more profound dislocations over the decade of Prime Minister Tony Abbott. Howard had his successes and failures. Arguable his most memorable policies were the Guns Control legislation, the GST and the East Timor intervention. His abysmal attitudes if not legislated policies were the AWB deceit, the David Hicks disgrace and the Pacific Solution inhumanity. Abbott as a key minister in those Howard Governments is scared also. Can he rise above these failures, change his "values" - he will have to in order to respond to what is coming in a worldwide USA-PRC confrontation - in Africa and South America, West, North Central and East Asia. To engage effectively with Asia in the 21st century - and specifically Indonesia and ASEAN - Australia will have to jettison its Anglo-sphere attitudes and the elite conservative Catholic Christian certainties. Grappling with moderate Muslim values and attitudes, and their certainties, will be a priority. Our education system is therefore central to future government policies/solutions. Ironically an economic recovery in the EU and accommodation with Russia, and therefore their increased re-engagement post colonial attitudes with our region, is essential to give weight to Australia in Asian, African and America forums.

It is impossible to even hypothesize what this means domestically for Australia even in 2020 let alone the years and decades beyond. As Kevin Rudd said recently in Toronto, the South China Sea dispute could quickly change everything. Or as I like many others have warned, watch Israel and Iran. However in Canberra the Israeli Lobby will soon be eclipsed by the China Lobby and PM Abbott will have to dance to new music !!