

Machiavellian Green games



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In a recent article in *The Age*, Noel Towell referred to the Greens' "House of Card's saga". This is an apt description for the recent Machiavellian power play. Many of us, particularly those of us in the Darebin branch of the Greens, have been rendered speechless.

With all the leaking, it is not surprising that the names of the complainants have trickled out. I have been told 6 ringleaders drove the complaint against Alex Bhathal. One branch member describes them as "cancerous saboteurs". Unfortunately defamation laws prevent me naming the "saboteurs". Suffice to say they are all men. Some rifts are deep and ancient.

Over many years and on many occasions, Alex has stood up to people, including power brokers in the party. She is not afraid to tell people what she thinks when she doesn't agree with them. As one Darebin member told Guy Rundle: "Alex has a manner that is forthright. She tells you what she thinks of your ideas, or your position, if she doesn't agree with it. But it's not bullying. It's just not middle-class politeness". Unfortunately, Alex's forthright manner incurred some people's wrath.

The ringleaders used their media contacts to leak the so-called 'dosier' (i.e. 101 page grievance). Although I support grievance processes, 18 people making a collective grievance is a political attack, not a grievance. This cowardly public attack, with the complainants remaining anonymous, brought the Greens into public disrepute and ridicule. Their actions undermine the claim that Greens do politics differently.

According to my source, only two ringleaders are members of the Darebin branch. As Guy Rundle suggested in *Crikey*, these men "played a role as a mentor to a number of young people joining the Darebin branch". These younger members – mostly university students/recent graduates – appear to have been used as pawns in this House of Cards-like saga.

My assessment is many in the faction are "career-driven", motivated by ambition, envy and malice. Their clash with Alex seems to be based on different pathways to politics (Alex is a grass roots activist). The clash is not based on differences in political ideology.

Over the past year or so, I have watched this faction attempt to undermine Alex. They have tried every trick in the book. They even tried to delay pre selection so they could find a candidate to contest Batman.

In 2016, they parachuted into the branch a candidate who challenged Alex for pre selection. He left the branch immediately after Alex defeated him. This time, they couldn't find a candidate in time. Much to their dismay, Alex was the only candidate to stand for pre selection in 2017.

The results of both 2016 and 2017 pre selections show Alex has the overwhelming support of the branch (something both Chip Le Grand in The Australian and Jon Faine on ABC radio failed to mention). At the recent pre selection, 19 members voted to "seek other candidate". This represents less than 4.5% of our branch.

Much has been made in the media of Alex supporting Lidia Thorpe rather than Trent McCarthy in the Northcote pre selection. Although Lidia is a new member of the Greens, many of us, including Alex, considered her to be a stronger candidate than Trent McCarthy. This explains why Lidia won pre selection in a democratic election. I understand Trent McCarthy's disappointment - he has worked tirelessly for the Greens over many years. But this is 'grown up' State politics - and the best candidate won.

Whilst Lidia has been out campaigning for Alex day in and day out (even volunteering to guard a polling booth last night), the four Darebin councillors have been missing in action. In contrast, Alex supported the Greens' councillors during their campaign for local council. In typical Alex style, she door knocked and attended all the local community events.

Alex's endorsement of Trent McCarthy, Kim Le Serf, Steph Amir and Susanne Newton as candidates in the most recent council elections was instrumental in their success. Trent McCarthy acknowledged this at a branch meeting. He said their success at the local elections came on the back of Alex's strong 2016 Batman campaign.

I cannot pin point the time when relationships went sour with the councillors. It was before I joined the Greens and long before the Northcote pre selection. I can however attest to Alex reaching out to work collaboratively with the councillors and them responding disrespectfully. At the Darebin Council's rainbow raising flag ceremony, this disrespect was palpable.

Over the past year or so, several within the anti-Alex faction have repeatedly made unsubstantiated allegations of branch stacking. The allegation of a "surge" in membership was first raised as an agenda item in March 2017 branch meeting. Since then, evidence has been tabled to refute this allegation. However, when you're on a political mission, you never let truth get in the way of a good grievance.

The allegation that Alex is a bully is also absurd. Anyone who knows Alex knows she is a compassionate woman and certainly not a bully. However, given the reputation of some ringleaders, the allegation is not surprising. The oldest trick in a bully's handbook is to accuse another of being a bully.

A twist in the allegation of bullying is some young "career-driven" members misinterpret robust debate, criticism and the 'argy-bargy' of politics as "bullying". For example, several branch members disagreed with the decision to include "surge in membership" as an item on the agenda of a branch meeting. During a spirited debate, the convenor at the time walked out of the room claiming she was being "bullied". Gobsmaacking.

Another recent example was when a councillor claimed to have been “bullied” seemingly because she was beaten in a branch election. She was the only candidate in this election, so I appreciate her humiliation when she was beaten by “seek another candidate”. However, there are many reasons to explain why this candidate lost the election. Bullying is not one of them.

The councillor’s candidate’s statement included two foolish statements that indicated her unsuitability to be a Greens MP. She said: “We know that we can’t wait for Preston and Reservoir to become gentrified.” This statement made incorrect assumptions about many of us who vote Green. It also indicates a poor understanding of both the principles and values of the Greens and the grassroots activism that underpins the Party.

The councillor also chose to insult women when she stated: “I work part time and don’t have children so am able to devote the time and energy the campaign needs to succeed.” Is it any wonder the majority of members in her electorate chose to vote ‘seek other candidate’? Misogyny has no place politics.

The complainants may see my article as further evidence of Alex “ruthlessly using me as a proxy to stifle debate”. This is such a ludicrous allegation. Both Alex and I welcome debate. It is ‘snowflakes’ who stifle debate. They do this by labeling those of us who disagree with them as a “bully”. At a recent branch meeting, I held my tongue rather than tell a Councillor she was confusing state and federal aged care policy.

Noel Towey also asserted that newcomers to the party have a "whatever-it-takes" approach to their politics. This assertion has some merit. Some newcomers (like myself) have come to the Greens via the ALP. We left the ALP because of their inhumane policies on asylum seekers and their weak response to the climate emergency. Unfortunately some ‘ALP refugees’ have brought 1990s ALP-style politics with them. They too have undermined the claim that the Greens do politics differently.

I had intended to exit quietly from the Greens by not renewing my membership. However, the "whatever-it-takes" tactics used during the Batman by election have prompted me to exit loudly. These tactics are listed in my resignation letter.

Despite resigning my party membership, I voted Green in the by election and encouraged others in Batman to do the same. Alex embodies the principles and values of the Greens. Unlike the complainants, Alex lives and breathes grassroots participatory democracy, believes in peace and non-aggression and social justice. I rest my case.

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The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author and they do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of any other branch member.