

Facebook Posts seeking justice for Alex Bhathal

24 March 2018

I am glad I was quoted speaking positively about Alex Bhathal (in the Saturday Paper), but wish I'd used the present tense! "Alex IS one of the most honourable people I've ever met...a great injustice has been done to her".

Martin McKenzie Murray analyses a pernicious culture that is harming the robust context of ideas. Frank and fearless discussion and disagreement - without fear of being labelled a "bully" - is necessary for a healthy democracy.

27 March 2018

You reap what you sow...

A small number of ambitious and nasty people in the Darebin branch and Moreland 'borg' (who don't even have the integrity to name themselves) have defamed a truly honourable woman, Alex Bhathal.

Alex lives the 4 pillars of the Greens - these pillars are the essence of who she is. The Greens need people like Alex, and Australia needs politicians like Alex.

28 March 2018

Alex Bhathal is a very gracious woman who gave a gracious speech conceding defeat in the Batman by election.

I don't know what effect the publicity about a confidential internal grievance made to the election outcome, but the unsubstantiated allegations certainly defamed an honourable woman. I hope those who are complicit in this mess reflect deeply on what they have done (particularly in relation to the 4 pillars) and find some peace.

29 March 2018

Since publishing my reasons for resigning from The Greens in an essay "House of Cards" (19 March 2018), I have received 100s of unsolicited messages from strangers, mostly women. These messages describe bullying, intimidation, sexual inappropriateness and leaks to the media. Alex Bhathal is certainly not the only Greens candidate to be vilified. In fact, I feel a sense of déjà vu. The same 6 or so names keep coming up. These people have a long track record of vilifying people with whom they disagree.

So many people vote for Greens precisely because of the assumed lack of this kind of crap. But evidence indicates the Greens are just like any other party. With careerists trying to climb all over activists (who are the heart and soul of the Greens).

I understand those who made a political attack against Alex by signing a group grievance threatened to leak these allegations to the media if Alex was not dis-endorsed. They are all therefore complicit in the leaks and must be expelled from the Greens ASAP. The longer leadership delays taking action, the more damage is being done to The Greens' reputation in the community.

My sadness is some of these people who signed the group grievance are 'good Greens' who have been led astray.

Shame shame shame on those who filled their minds with poison and convinced them to make a political attack on an honourable woman.

29 March 2018

What do you call a leak to the media that then gets leaked back? [Someone with a conscience in the Greens has just sent me the] 101 page [dossier], mostly dribble. A plumbing disaster? Poetic Justice?

This is now officially a spy novel. My code name is "Justified Indignation, Northcote".

29 March 2018

I have an ethical question for my Facebook friends, particularly those with an interest in the recent Batman election. The so-called "leakers" put Alex on the front page of newspapers and ABC radio whilst remaining anonymous.

If I named all the signatories, and this appeared on the front page of The Age, would this be ethically OK if I named myself as the source and showed the journalist the dossier (which has now been leaked and verified)?

30 March 2018

I have received an overwhelming number of messages of support for Alex Bhathal over past 2 weeks. Mostly strangers. It has made me reflect (whilst playing beach cricket) why all these people didn't come out earlier – when they realised Alex was being undermined from within her own party.

Why didn't they all stand up for Alex 5 years ago, 3 years ago, last year?

I may have an explanation:

I recall the time Willisa Hogarth (Victorian Greens' convenor) came to a branch meeting in March 2017 – she was the first person to name the faction that was undermining Alex. I remember many branch members being shocked – they were not aware of any faction (even though I had spotted it clearly at my first branch meeting). Even after these people were made aware of what this faction was doing to Alex, many people didn't believe it was happening. They chose to believe that there must be a good and just reason for why it was happening.

After the leak, it became crystal clear that the reasons are neither good nor just. It seems to me that many people chose to stay out of it because they hoped the issue would resolve itself (although I don't know how it could have been resolved without us all standing up for Alex).

In contrast, people like me fight – I was a new member yet I met with the faction leader and expressed my concerns. I also emailed the mayor: her reply made me choke on my cornflakes. No one who believes in the four pillars would behave like the councillors were behaving towards Alex. Someone who believed in the four pillars would certainly not have been party to leaking an internal grievance to the media.

I realise now how hard it has been for so many people to fight. So many are disheartened/overwhelmed and they leave the party. The good Green guys who stay seem so battle-scarred, tired and most importantly wary, even frightened. People become afraid to speak because they know the consequences. And this is the party that does politics differently. #IStandwithAlex

2 April 2018

My posts will now Fact Check the allegations leaked to the media during the Batman by election.

Today's FB post refers to the surge in membership (AKA "branch stacking"). I attended a Greens' Darebin Branch meeting in March 2017 (over a year ago) when a "surge in membership" was first discussed. A branch member explained his reasons for his concerns. As a result of these concerns, a new committee was formed: New Members Working Group. I joined this committee. For obvious reasons, I cannot name the members of this group, particularly the Chair.

One outcome of this working group is that new members are now all telephoned - to confirm their reasons for joining the Greens. This "surge in membership" has been proven without doubt to be based on real people joining the Greens, mostly for the usual 3 reasons (refugees, climate, inequality).

At a branch meeting in April 2017, I speculated that the increase after 2016 summer holidays may have been due to alt-right's political success, particularly Trump (November 2016) and Pauline Hanson (July 2016). I also took some responsibility for the surge. I had encouraged dog walkers with whom I discussed politics to follow my lead (pun intended) by joining Greens.

The issue of branch stacking (the language changed from "surge" to "stack") was addressed in several subsequent meetings. The faction was clearly pushing this issue. However, each time it was raised, it was dismissed as ridiculous. In fact, some new members were present at these meetings when these absurd claims of branch stacking were made. These new members were definitely not blow up dolls or holograms (Star Trek reference seems appropriate here).

Despite constant evidence-based rebuttals, the issue of branch stacking did not go away. So in an email on the 28 February 2018, the branch secretary shared his analysis with all members of the Darebin branch.

"I would like to assure everyone (including anyone in the ALP or media that this email could be leaked to) that there is absolutely NO branch stacking going on in the Darebin Greens, nor is there any evidence that suggests otherwise. People are joining our party/branch not because anyone told them to join but because they are fed up with Labor, they know we can win seats like Batman & want to help us do that".

On 1st March 2018, the day after branch members received the email from the branch secretary, Chip Le Grand repeated this unsubstantiated allegation of "branch stacking" in The Australian. He blamed this non-existent "branch stacking" entirely on Alex Bhathal. This was most unjust.

(To be perfectly frank, I'm surprised the Secret 7 didn't blame Alex for the conflict in the Middle East - they certainly blame her for everything else!)

In his article in the Australian, Chip reported directly from the so-called "dossier". He claimed Alex "recruited a dramatic influx of new members to the Darebin branch early last year to stack the numbers in favour of her own preselection and marginalise perceived political opponents".

The most absurd thing about this mischievous allegation (that had been disproven over and over again) is that Alex was the ONLY candidate to stand for Batman preselection. Alex knew she had the overwhelming support of branch members, many who had supported her for over a decade. There was simply no reason for her to recruit new members.

I tried to put the following facts on the public record but unfortunately my Op Ed in The Age was edited. And Martin McKenzie Murray, quoted from the Age.

The facts are:

The Darebin branch has 391 members. Although voting is not compulsory, 252 members voted in the 2017 Batman preselection. Only 19 (4.8% of branch members) voted "seek other candidate". It was simply INCORRECT for the media to keep stating the faction is around 10% of branch. The faction is so small, many branch members did not even notice it. However the faction clearly has illusions of grandeur.

It is also worth noting that 5 people named on this grievance had not attended a branch meeting in past 12 months. One person held a house party for Ged (suggesting her/his political allegiances may have changed).

Conclusion:

It was dishonest for this allegation to be repeated in a formal grievance after it had been proven wrong. It was also immoral for Chip Le Grand to report an unsubstantiated allegation in a national newspaper. It was this article in the Oz that began the attacks in other newspapers such as The Age and Leader (Chip Le Grand wrote article in The Leader!)

Regarding who leaked the dossier to Chip: I suggest party check the CVs of those named on the grievance. Has anyone of these saboteurs worked in the media, perhaps someone who worked with Chip during their early career?

If this person does not admit his/her "crime", I recommend asking this person to sign an Affidavit. I also highly recommend reading the minutes from The New Members Working Group. I can submit my notes from the meetings I attended, if you like.

Over and Out.

Justified Indignation, Northcote.

3 April 2018

Today's fact check concerns the false allegation published in The Australian that Alex Bhathal "orchestrated a campaign to undermine the preselection chances of City of Darebin councillor Susanne Newton in the state seat of Preston."

Ms Newton orchestrated her own failure to gain preselection, as evidenced by the following facts:

Ms Newton was the only candidate to stand for pre-selection for Preston in 2017. She was beaten by "seek other candidate". Although I appreciate Ms Newton's humiliation being beaten by "seek other candidate", it is wrong for the complainants to attribute blame to Alex Bhathal. They should instead blame Ms Newton's candidate statement and her performance at the "Meet the Candidate Forum".

The candidate statement submitted to all members of Darebin Branch prior to the election shows clearly why Ms Newton was unsuitable to be the Greens' candidate for Preston.

Quoting directly from Ms Newton's candidate statement, she stated: "We know that we can't wait for Preston and Reservoir to become gentrified". This statement made incorrect assumptions about many people who vote Green. It is certainly not only hipsters, university graduates and upwardly mobile software developers. Many Green voters in Darebin have lived in the area long before smashed avocado and soy caffè lattes.

Ms Newton's statement about gentrification indicated a poor understanding of the grassroots activism that underpins the Greens. Like all careerists, Ms Newton may have a good understanding of the constitution and grievance processes, but she clearly demonstrated a lack of understanding of the values at the core of the Greens' four pillars.

Another quote from the candidate statement is equally shocking. Despite being the co-convener of the Victorian Greens Women's Network, Ms Newton 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". Such blatant misogyny encouraged many members to vote "seek other candidate" rather than vote for Ms Newton. After reading the candidate statement, Leon Zembekis and a few other branch members phoned people in the electorate to encourage them to vote "seek other candidate". This was neither a secret nor a conspiracy and it was certainly not a co-ordinated attack on Ms Newton.

Ms Newton appears unwilling to accept she was beaten by the calibre of her candidacy. Rather than take responsibility for the election result, and reflect on the mistakes she made in both her candidate statement and her "Meet the Candidate Forum", Ms Newton and the other complainants blame Alex Bhathal. If you must blame someone, why not blame Leon Zembekis?

Ms Newton spoke at a recent branch meeting about "feeling bullied" by the election result (and undoubtedly by this post). This is evidence that she is an unsuitable candidate for the 'rough and tumble' of state politics.

I am furious that the complainants blamed Alex for the outcome of this pre selection. I am even more furious that they chose to repeat this unsubstantiated allegation to the media before discussing their concerns with the branch. I am sure Leon would have been happy to discuss his pre-election activities. As I said yesterday, the complainants see everything through a malicious lens and attribute malicious motives to Alex. Alex in contrast does not have a malicious bone in her body.

A pattern has emerged: when the complainants don't get what they want (e.g. preselection), they blamed Alex. When they didn't get what they wanted via internal grievance processes, the grievance was leaked to the media. Most of us grow out of this type of juvenile behaviour by the time we're old enough to vote. #TimesUp

4 April 2018

3 serious allegations were published in the Australian's article "Greens call for by election candidate to be axed" (1st March 2018). In previous posts, I have provided evidence to rebut the first two allegations:

(1) That Alex Bhathal recruited a dramatic influx of new members to the Darebin branch early last year to stack the numbers in favour of her own preselection and marginalise perceived political opponents. (Rebutted on 2nd April 2018)

(2) That she orchestrated a campaign to undermine the preselection chances of City of Darebin councillor Susanne Newton in the state seat of Preston. (Rebutted on 3rd April 2018)

Today I will rebut the third allegation: "that Alex waged a ruthless, inter-cine war against four Greens members of the Darebin council".

This allegation is the pot calling the kettle black!

I witnessed Alex reaching out on numerous occasions to work collaboratively with the councillors and them responding with contempt. I have seen the councillors ignore Alex and heard them denigrate her. I was very upset about this behaviour that was clearly intended to undermine Alex.

As everyone noticed, the 4 councillors who were missing in action during the recent Batman by election. In contrast, Alex gave her full support for the Greens' candidates at the 2016 local council elections. Alex door knocked on weekends and attended community events during the campaign. Alex's hard work during the local council election campaign was instrumental in the 4 Greens' candidates success.

At a branch meeting in February 2017, Trent McCarthy acknowledged the Greens' success at the local council elections was "on the back of Alex Bhathal's wonderful 2016 Batman election campaign". Let's hope one day the councillors have the grace to thank Alex for all her hard work.

During my short stint as a Darebin Green, I witnessed the Darebin councillors (particularly Trent, Kim and Susanne) behave disgracefully at branch meetings. Attached is a photo (that is now deleted). I took this photo at the first branch meeting I ever attended (February 2017). I was shocked to see Kim and Trent on their phones the entire meeting. I took these 2 photos for a university colleague who is researching the inappropriate use of mobile phones. I considered the councillors using a mobile phone during an important branch discussion about the timing of the Batman pre selection as inappropriate. (I now realise they were part of a faction trying to delay pre selection so they could find a candidate to contest Alex at the Batman pre selection).

The following branch meeting, I noticed Susanne on her phone the entire branch meeting. I was discombobulated by all this frenetic telecommunication during branch meetings. When I expressed my concerns directly to Susanne, she dismissed my criticism by pointing at another branch member saying he was also using his phone.

On 17 May 2017, I spoke with both Trent McCarthy and Kim Le Cerf about my observations about the disunity within the Darebin branch. I felt several branch members (including both Trent and Kim) were targeting Alex. They both denied they had any ill feeling towards Alex. Kim stated in an email (20 May 2017): "Unfortunately these differences of opinions are sometimes interpreted as targeting individuals".

It seems now that my interpretation of their behaviours as targeting Alex was in fact correct.

I will not respond to the numerous frivolous complaints in the 101 page dossier such as (1) standing in front of another Greens representative at a media doorstep so she wouldn't appear on TV; (2) of "unfriending" a party member on Facebook and (3) (in typical careerist "Greens speak", of projecting, triggering and making the Darebin branch an unsafe space.

I will however say this: Alex is one of the most honourable people I've ever met. A great injustice has been done to her.

These Facebook posts are not motivated by malice or revenge. I am merely seeking justice for a woman who has given so much of her life to the Greens. I would like to see her vindicated and warmly welcomed back to the branch. This will require those who undermined her to resign from the branch.

It is my view that the 4 Greens Councillors (and others in branch) are envious of Alex's respect and popularity in the local community. At several council events (such as the rainbow raising flag ceremony), I witnessed local people talking with Alex rather than the councillors. I suspect the councillors may have felt slighted when Alex gets all the attention, not them.

It is clearly in the interests of the Greens for the 4 local councillors, Northcote MP (Lidia Thorpe) and Alex (Green's pre selected candidate for Batman) to all work together. Lidia gave Alex her full support during the recent by election. The Councillors chose to undermine her.

I rest my case.
Justified Indignation, Northcote.

5 April 2018

More fact checking.

From my reading of the grievances in the so-called "dossier", this document does not meet the court of public opinion/pub test. In my view, the fact it was ever seriously considered by the state co-convenors is a serious indictment on them and their political judgement.

Some of the complaints are very old – in one case 14 years old. Why did the complainants not raise their issues through the proper party processes at the time? Why wait – until the Greens stood on the doorstep of a winnable by-election?

One of the contributors hosted a meet the candidate event for Ged Kearney during the Batman by-election campaign. She explained to me this morning that: "Some time ago, before Ged Kearney was even the ALP candidate, I was approached about giving a statement in support of a complaint being made about the conduct of Alex Bhathal".

This suggests that she was "recruited" to make a complaint - about something that happened 14 years ago. As I've said before, people are entitled to use grievance processes. But being approached to join a group grievance provides further evidence of this being a political attack.

And what of the actual gripes the complainants put forward in this 101-page whinge-fest? Apart from the 3 serious allegations that I have refuted with evidence in the past 3 days, the other complaints can best be summarised as: 'Alex unfriended me on Facebook'. Or, 'Alex stood in front of me in a photo.' This is the kind of stuff that was used to destroy Alex's reputation. Frivolous and pathetic rubbish.

I've been told that at least one councillor believes my Facebook posts are a form of bullying. Last night at the branch meeting, this person showed a complete indifference to the damage her actions have had on Alex Bhathal. Instead, she insisted that the minutes record that one of the complainants (the ONLY one with the integrity to tell branch she signed the grievance and why she signed it) no longer feels "safe" coming to Greens meetings.

Has this councillor given a moment's thought to how Alex is feeling right now? She does not feel "safe" to leave her house, walk down her street, go to the shops - for fear people will call her a "bully". Yes, a speech was made at the meeting with some comments made directly from the "double-leaked document". But this does not compare in any way to the "leaked document" being published in newspapers and part of grievance read word-for-word on air by Jon Faine.

*Shaking my head in bewilderment.

At the meeting, several people tried to call a vote on a motion to expel all complainants from the branch. But they were shouted down by the complainants. The complainants then all picked up their bat and ball and walked out. High drama in the Darebin Greens.

In the end, a resolution was passed to support Alex and let the internal review run its course.

For those reading these posts who are no longer members, the review will take submissions from ex and non-members. This is an opportunity to expose the shenanigans of a party (ranging from silly to very serious) that alleges it does politics differently.

A special message to all those who have contacted me over past few weeks: get writing!!

5 April 2018

Last night, just as I was settling in to watch Mad as Hell, every device in my house pinged and beeped. The interruption was people attending the Darebin Branch giving me blow-by-blow descriptions. I had not solicited any of these messages.

I was told about Ollie Bennett's "Pot calling kettle black" sign and also sent a photo of smashing patriarchy on her phone (of course).

And then I got an influx of messages saying: "WOW, Simon has just made a superb speech". I also got messages to say the complainants tried to shout him down so that his speech could not be heard. Several people tried to call a vote but they were shouted down accompanied by walkouts from some complainants (and another man not involved in the complaint).

After the meeting (11.30pm), I phoned Simon to congratulate him. I also asked him to send me a copy of his speech. Here it is: <http://www.research-matters.com.au/p.../MotionBranchSpeech.pdf>

I read Simon's speech and cried. I am sure many of you will too.

My post earlier today paraphrased Simon's speech. I have since been asked to take my post down. The complainants and their friends argue they have done "nothing wrong". In their minds, it seems there is "nothing wrong" with ruining the reputation of another human being. I disagree.

I am appalled at the Greens' grievance procedures that protect the complainants but not the accused. As a matter of due process, Alex should have been permitted to see the complaints made against her, and who made them, in order to defend herself. Surely the Greens believe in natural justice not trial by media.

Simon's speech has been described as "university politics". In my view Simon's speech was brave and honest. If you want a dose of university politics, I suggest you read the 101-page grievance.

I am now more determined than ever to seek justice for Alex - and to restore her reputation so she is welcomed back to the branch with open arms.
#TimesUp #Justicefor Alex #IStandwithAlex

5 April 2018

This "confidential grievance" lost its right to remain confidential when its content was given to the media.

My reading of the document is that there is a veiled or implied threat in the last paragraph of the cover letter. The name of every complainant is on that cover letter. Each one must bear responsibility for the leaks that subsequently occurred. Hence the motion last night requesting the resignations of all complainants from the Victorian Greens.

It basically says - if we don't get our way, we can't guarantee people won't go to the press. To quote verbatim: ""Some have been approached by journalists, aware of internal Darebin conflict, and have only been convinced not to speak out about their experiences, because this action has been organised...Those of us organising this process are struggling to keep people with us, dealing with this problem in-house. This s12 process is our last resort."

They didn't get what they wanted with the s12 process, so went to the media. In my view, all 18 complainants are therefore complicit in the leaks (irrespective of who actually gave the dossier to Chip Le Grand and Jon Faine).

It is worth noting that the original version of this article on-line named the councillors. The paper version doesn't. Trent McCarthy phoned to ask their names be removed. The plot thickens.

6 April 2018

My way to try to get justice for Alex has been to use my Facebook page to share my view that Alex is an honourable woman who did not deserve this public attack by people within her own party. I have also used the mainstream media - the same medium that was used to attack her. I wanted the public to know the serious allegations in the so-called "dossier" (e.g. branch stacking) were false.

I learnt yesterday that this dossier was in preparation for months and that people were "approached" to make submissions. I have concluded that this was intended as a political attack spearheaded by the small (but clearly powerful) anti-Alex Faction in the Darebin Branch.

I have been criticised for using the term "faction". However, if it looks like a faction, swims like a faction, and quacks like a faction, then I will call it a faction.

As a result of speaking out in public, numerous people have contacted me with their own stories of bullying, intimidation, sexual inappropriateness, misogyny, racism and leaks to the media (e.g. information from 2013 and 2014 State Council). Their stories are not mine to tell.

The thing that interests me, however, is same names keep coming up as the perpetrators of this behaviour. None of these people are named as complainants on the dossier, and I have never met these people. I recently heard the nick name 'Borg'.

I am a qualitative researcher. In qualitative research, there is a concept called "data saturation" - if a qualitative researcher hears the same information from different people, it is likely to be true.

I hope the internal investigation is able to clean up the party for the 1,000s of hard working members and volunteers who put their trust in the party and believe strongly in the party's four pillars: social justice, peace and non-violence, ecological sustainability and grassroots participatory democracy.

To quote Simon Jarman: "Violence perpetrated against anyone must never be a standard we are prepared to walk by and accept. If the actions of these individuals are swept under the carpet, then as a party we must acknowledge that our much-vaunted pillar of peace and non-violence is nothing but a sham and a hollow lie".

Signing off now.

I wish you all peace.

7 April 2018

Those "wearing a tin foil hat" (i.e. those with paranoia or a belief in conspiracy theories) are running around saying "Alex's side" is leaking. Once again the pot is calling the kettle black.

The only people who have leaked to the media are those in the 'Anti-Alex Faction'. Also, there are no "sides" - there are simply 16 Greens members, including 4 councillors, who have demonstrated clearly they don't like Alex - and set out to destroy her reputation. Many people in Darebin branch were oblivious to this conflict prior to media reports.

Let me put everything on the record: I am the only person talking with Noel Towell. Apart from that Greens' staffer, of course, who told Noel: "You're fucking finished. I'm going to tear you to fucking pieces" (14 March 2018).

The night of the Batman by election, after Alex conceded defeat, I sent Noel my "House of Cards" essay. He replied: "Wow, what a read. Thank you. We'll be in touch".

Over next few weeks, we stayed in touch. After the branch meeting last Wednesday night, I sent Noel a copy of Simon's speech and told him about the messages I had received during the Shakespearean branch meeting. This led to Noel's online article Thursday afternoon and the hard copy on Friday.

After reading the hard copy, I texted Noel with my concerns about Trent McCarthy's power to alter the content of the article. This text perhaps motivated Noel to publish today's article about the 4 councillors.

Yes, I have a copy of the dossier. Yes, I have shared it with people I know and trust who have asked me for a copy. Noel asked for a copy. Alex Bhathal has not asked for a copy, once again demonstrating her integrity.

One last thing for the record - I am not Alex Bhathal's friend. I have never visited her house. I met her husband and children for the first time at a Refugee Rally the weekend before the election. I don't know if she has dogs, cats, tropical fish or chickens.

I am seeking justice for Alex simply because people in her own party, including the 4 Councillors, destroyed an honourable woman's reputation. I am appalled by this injustice.

Trent McCarthy looked me in the eyes and told me he did not contribute to this grievance. How could someone as devoted to the Greens as Trent - and who (publicly at least) believes in the 4 pillars - deceive me like this?

One thing that has bothered me about Noel's reporting of this saga, apart from him publishing unsubstantiated allegations, is this notion that Alex has stood 6 times, and lost each time. I have asked Noel to consider recognising the extraordinary feat Alex achieved by transforming the safest ALP seat in the country to the most marginal. It is an example of the power of grassroots democracy and committed activism.

8 April 2018

Remember Watergate? For those too young to remember - Watergate was a major political scandal in USA that led to the discovery of multiple abuses of power by members of Nixon's administration. The scandal resulted not only in Nixon's resignation but also the indictment of his top officials.

The thing to remember about Watergate is the party's attempt to cover it up. Cover ups never go well. It all comes out in the end.

Politicians must be held to account. Those who protect a politician's appalling behaviour must also be held to account.

10 April 2018

May I suggest people listen to the message rather than shoot me. I am happy to make corrections if I have made a mistake. I am not happy to be accused of "feeding the right" as Jeanette Pope stated angrily. I am not trying to "bring down the Greens" (again, Jeanette Pope). I am merely trying to expose the unconscionable behaviour of 4 Councillors (for starters, at least).

I am a qualitative researcher - and the strongest theme to emerge from the 100s of messages, texts and emails is that members don't speak out about the "dangerously corrupt and ambitious, abusive and bullying internal organisational culture" (as one person described it), is because they "don't want public exposure of [insert 10 or so names]'s behaviour to harm the Greens".

This morning, a member suggested Melbourne University's Pathways to Politics Program for Women has contributed to "the problem of self-serving careerism becoming rampant in the Greens. It turns grassroots politics and activism on its head - in lieu of the collective cause, these alumna are concerned primarily with their own careers."

As I said, I am merely the messenger.

10 April 2018

My public Facebook posts have been designed to help Alex Bhathal get justice for the way some colleagues (e.g. 4 Darebin Councillors) treated her during the Batman by election.

I initially tried to keep this as an internal matter. I emailed the Victorian Greens Convenors everything I knew. The subject heading was: "What I know". I provided evidence to show conclusively that this attack on Alex Bhathal was a pre-meditated political attack against a woman who not only stands up for herself, but for many others.

Her reply: "Dear Sarah, As you have resigned your membership and have taken to criticising the Greens in national media, please do not contact us further".

I had nowhere to go but here.

My Facebook posts were public but my chats with Noel Towell were initially all private (i.e. off the record). It was not until I heard about the appalling behaviour at branch meeting (with 4 branch members, including a councillor, shouting over people to silence them) and Simon Jarman's brave speech that I spoke on the record.

I have not, and will not, share stories I have heard from others (Greens media officer: please note you have jumped to the wrong conclusion).

I have been thinking a lot about Truth and Reconciliation. Maybe a good place to start?

10 April 2018

I'm getting abused left right and centre (political pun intended). Those who organised this attack have created a narrative that we "must wait for the internal review". They describe media articles about the grievance as "bullshit" and "fiction", but no evidence is provided to contest the claims in the media.

The saboteurs say they are sick of the public naming and shaming, clearly forgetting the role they played in the naming and shaming of Alex Bhathal. Also Guy Rundle's article in Crikey is blamed for weaponising the media. This is "bullshit" - the only impact the Crikey article had was to embarrass Trent McCarthy.

The real damage was done by Chip Le Grand and Jon Faine. Most people say they know who gave the grievance to Chip (colleagues years ago) and Jon Faine (friends with producer). These and other rumours are killing the Victorian Greens. If these people (aka "the leakers") really cared about the Greens (as they purport to do), they would confess now, not wait for another flawed internal bureaucratic process.

10 April 2018

Now the unconscionable behaviour of the 4 Darebin Councillors has been exposed, it's only a matter of time before it all comes tumbling down...and the Greens will be able to rebuild bigger, better and more ethical than before.

The four pillars are not abstract concepts. They are the foundations of a party's values - about how we treat refugees, climate emergency, Indigenous Australians, racism, sexism, inequality...and each other.

I may no longer be a member of the Greens, but, given I'm a social democrat, they have my vote.

11 April 2018

Since my public resignation from The Greens, I have received many unsolicited messages from strangers. I have heard stories of bullying, intimidation, sexual inappropriateness. Interestingly, the same names (all white men) keep coming up. #TimesUp

As I said the other day, cover-ups never go well. It all comes out in the end. And those who covered up this story about Greg Barber must also be held to account.

11 April 2018

At 0828 this morning, before I had eaten my weet-bix, I received an email from the Director of Victorian Greens. She alleged that the new "leaker" (that is, the person who leaked an email about Greg Barber to The Age) received the material from me, directly or indirectly. She suggested I get legal advice.

After wishing her good morning, I reminded her that many people would have widely circulated such an explosive email. However, I did not. This was not my story to tell.

I then replied to the Director using similar logic she had used.

"Did you make the same suggestion to Jim Buckell and Trent McCarthy about legal advice?"

Both Jim and Trent are indisputably the leaders of the Anti-Alex faction in the Darebin Branch. The media would therefore have received material from them, directly or indirectly.

I am not suggesting that Jim and Trent gave the dossier to Chip Le Grand and Jon Faine (though many are). However, someone got the ball rolling by sharing the confidential grievance, and these "someones" are likely to be the leaders of the Anti-Alex faction.

Sharing a confidential grievance with a 3rd party (journalist, PR company or another Green member with media contacts) is an act of treachery that should be swiftly condemned.

A party that is based on four strong pillars of justice should apologise to victims (e.g. Alex Bhathal) rather than intimidate whistleblowers (e.g. me).

12 April 2018

The irony of being asked to keep quiet to protect brand Green at a time when we are asked to keep the memory of Dr King alive, 50 years after his assassination.

12 April 2018

Brave and honest Op Ed. Thank you Lynette Keleher.

"The internal sabotage that doomed the Greens campaign for Batman and the party's treatment of Bhathal, a powerful woman and Greens figure who inspires many, is the public evidence of what many passionate and committed Greens members already know, that our party is overridden by a abusive and bullying internal organisational culture. And that racism is rampant in the party and embedded in its processes and structures." #TimesUp

13 April 2018

Letter in The Age:

A loss of credibility on bullying and discrimination

High-ranking Greens official Colin Jacobs says he knew about the allegations against Greg Barber but did not tell his wife, Samantha Ratnam, the Victorian Greens leader. Mr Jacobs is missing the point. What was done to ensure the alleged victim was not bullied or suffered sex discrimination in the workplace? What was done to improve the workplace culture? Were processes established for discrimination complaints to go to the party room? The answers appear to be nothing, nothing and no.

The Greens will lose credibility in their claims to support action against bullying or sex discrimination towards women if it protects men in the party who allegedly do this. There are thousands of wonderful, hard-working people in the Greens who are committed to the party's four pillars. It is very sad that a small number of ambitious careerists are destroying what could be a great party for those of us on the left.

Sarah Russell, Northcote

I will be explicit about the specific, concrete, achievable outcomes I desire. But first let me say that, as a member of Darebin Branch, I witnessed 7 people spearhead a campaign to undermine Alex Bhathal - both before and after she was pre-selected as the candidate for Batman. I now know (thanks to Susanne Newton) that the dossier was in preparation for several months and that people were actively "approached" to contribute a grievance to the dossier. So this was undoubtedly a deliberately planned political attack against the Greens' candidate for Batman by people within Greens.

On 28th March, I sent a message to Trent McCarthy in which I stated: " I hope this all gets dealt with swiftly by the Victorian Greens so that the Greens do not lose too much respect in the community. In my view, it would be better for the 4 councillors to resign (and spend remainder of your tenure as Independents) rather than a public expulsion. But this is obviously your choice."

I also think the x-co-convenors, James Murphy and Sanaya Khristy, whose behaviour towards Alex was disgraceful, should resign from the Greens, or be expelled. One example (there are many, trust me) occurred at the most recent AGM. Alex had bought all the office holders a small gift. Both James and Sanaya refused to accept the gift. This was not only ungracious and juvenile, it was an act of overt hostility.

Finally, Jim Buckell transformed his personal feelings towards Alex into a public vendetta. Many people in the branch witnessed this, including me. So in summary, the specific, concrete, achievable outcomes I desire is these 7 people to resign from the Greens ASAP. This would certainly be in the best interests of the Greens. And preferable to expulsions that will undoubtedly hit the media headlines.

With regard all the other stories I have heard, I have no first hand knowledge of any of them. I hope the Greens' internal processes will be able to deal with them. However, for the record, if the processes used to resolve the grievance against Alex is any indication, LOTS of work is required to improve the Greens' processes.

Are my expectations as to resignations and apologies realistic? I think so - considering these 7 people purport to uphold the 4 pillars. Hiding in dark corners (or secret Facebook groups) is not behaviour one expects from people who are members of The Greens.

One of the complainants stood up at a recent branch meeting and told us all that she "made a submission" (her words) and explained why she had done so. I (and many others) respected her courage and honesty.

In contrast, Trent banged on about the inaccuracies in the original Crikey article. At no stage has Trent or the other 3 councillors shown any remorse for their actions in undermining the Greens candidate in the Batman by election. This was a winnable election - and they blew the Greens' chances of having another MP in Federal Parliament. Shame shame shame.

Before people run around screaming defamation - truth is a defence. I and at least 60 other branch members witnessed everything I witnessed.

What caused that outburst? It has been a month since the election. A month! Also - when Noel Towell at The Age first got the dossier, he was considering naming all the complainants. I argued strongly against this - because I am sure some of the complainants did not know what they were getting into. And they did not deserve public opprobrium, in my opinion. But these 7 certainly knew EXACTLY what they were doing. And they deserve public opprobrium.

The other motivation was hearing this morning that a Senior member of Greens was so insensitive she did an 'air drum roll' before telling Alex she was cleared and would be able to stand. Gobsmacking!

I too have faith in, and respect for, the thousands of people who are committed to the 4 pillars and work tirelessly for our planet, refugees and social equality. I left the Greens so I could speak out on FB without someone called Cindy reminding me of Section 44, paragraph 22, line 4 of the rule book.

13 April 2018

I don't know Colin Jacobs from Adam nor his wife Samantha Ratnam from Eve. However, I can say this about them: They both responded abysmally when allegations about Greg Barber's bullying and sexual harassment hit the media.

A decent person would begin with AN APOLOGY.

It is not just Greg Barber himself who needs to apologise but all the people who knew about his behaviour and said nothing. Trust me, an apology is much, much more important than a pay out.

"The standard you walk past, is the standard you accept"

13 April 2018

This statement from Victorian Greens Co-convenors comes out NOW (after media reports about the treachery of the 4 Councillors and allegations of bullying/sexual harassment against Greg Barber were both published in the Age). - NOT when the unsubstantiated rumours about Alex Bhathal were widely disseminated in the media.

Where was the Victorian Greens Co-convenors' public support for Alex Bhathal during the Batman by election?

I rest my case. #TimesUp

13 April 2018

Guy Rundle names the person who leaked the confidential grievance to the media. Hallelujah! Can the Victorian Co-convenors stop all this silly nonsense about continuing "to investigate the source of the leaks and find a way forward to defuse some of the tensions"?

Guy Rundle also provides some advice for tomorrow's State Council Meeting: "Expulsion is simply a tool a mature political party should employ. Since all signatories to the letter threatened explicit party sabotage, the case is open and shut. Sooner, rather than later, drop them down a lift-shaft. Figuratively speaking."

Personally, I don't agree with all complainants "being shafted". I've argued earlier today in favour of the resignation/expulsion of the 7 conspirators - however the longer this takes to resolve, and the longer the complainants take to explain their involvement in this political attack - the more I am warming to the idea of them all being expelled from both the branch and party.

In his previous article, Rundle made some reference to Buckley's Chance. He didn't need to use a riddle this time. We all know exactly who he is referring to when he states: "The two key leaks to News Corp and the ABC, in the lead-up to the byelection, were made by a longtime Greens member and state office-bearer, who had previously worked for both media organisations".

Next step is for this longtime Greens member and state office-bearer - Jim Buckell - to put his left hand up and confess.

14 April 2018

As many of you know, I have spent the past month providing evidence to contest the absurd claims made during the treacherous attack against Alex Bhathal during the Batman by election.

The impact my Facebook posts and private messages have had on the 7 people who spearheaded the attack has been zip, zero, ziltch, zéro, cero, null and Μηδέν No resignations...no conscience.

Of course Noel Towell and Guy Rundle would prefer public expulsions. It would be yet another opportunity for them to ridicule the Greens on the front page of The Age and Crikey. Most people who support Greens, however, would prefer this sorry saga ended now. Today.

There is a lot of work to do - climate emergency, refugees and social inequality. The 1,000 of hardworking Greens just want to get on with it. Most Greens want the Secret Seven and their supporters to stop their silly political games.

I was told yesterday that "politics is all about numbers".

But the Greens do politics differently...Isn't Greens' politics all about the four pillars?

14 April 2018

Many people criticise Facebook, and many of their criticisms are valid. However, on a positive note - Facebook has allowed Dr Nobody in The Greens (i.e. me) to share my views about this recent Green clusterfuck.

On two occasions, I have received a message from the State Director with a comment/correction within an hour of me posting a comment. On one occasion, a councillor liked a comment and then un-liked it almost immediately.

At a time when Mark Zuckerberg is in the firing line, there is at least one of the one billion Facebook users who says "Thank you".

14 April 2018

Does anyone else see the irony of leaking the terms of reference to investigate the leaking of a confidential grievance? Leaking the confidential grievance was part of a media strategy to attack Alex Bhathal. What on earth motivated the leaking of the terms of reference for the inquiry? An exaggerated sense of one's own value or importance?

15 April 2018

Dear Not-So-Secret Seven,

It is clear to me that you consider this Green clusterfuck a political game. You've worked hard to "get the numbers". In your mind, politics is just a numbers' game. Your game has had serious implications - much more serious than you could possibly have imagined.

The rules of your game are simple. You simply deny, deny and deny. Someone looks you in the eyes and asks: Are you one of the complainants? "No, of course not". Did you give the confidential grievance to the media**? "No!" Did you speak indiscreetly at a BBQ with Guy Rundle? "What BBQ?"

The first casualty of these type of political games is always the truth.

Here is an example of how you play your "game". On 5 April, The Age published an online article naming the 4 Green Darebin Councillors as part of the group that undermined Alex Bhathal. Trent McCarthy phoned the journalist to ask that the reference to Councillors be removed - based on a technicality: "because The Age has no proof that we are complainants" (deny, deny, deny). The Age had no choice but to remove the reference to the Councillors.

The next day, the journalist was given proof that the 4 Green Darebin Councillors are all complainants. And the 4 Green Councillors were all subsequently named and shamed in The Age.

Your inability to take ownership for what you have done, and explain to your fellow branch members why you did it, is cowardly. If you genuinely believe that you have "done nothing wrong", then tell members of the Darebin branch what you have done and why you did it.

May I suggest one of your "in-camera" meetings. At least then my phone won't be bing all night!

Dragging this on and on is strong evidence that you are thinking primarily about yourselves, not the collective good of the Party. Are you all so absorbed looking at your own belly buttons that you have forgotten the forthcoming State election?

And what about Rohan Leppert running for lord mayor of Melbourne. Do you care about the impact your shenanigans are having on him? (If you'd like some proof of the impact you've had, listen to Rohan's interview with Jon Faine).

Your inability to be open with your fellow branch members is keeping this issue alive in the media. Although your strategy of drip-feeding information to the media worked during the Batman by election, it is not working now.

Can't you see that it is not in the Party's interest for articles to keep appearing in Crikey and The Age? Yes, there are more to come. And yes, you are to blame.

With all due respect, your behaviour indicates you've chosen to be members of the wrong Party. Greens don't throw away winnable seats because they feel personally slighted.

I hear the Shooters Party is looking for members. Darebin Councillors moving from The Greens to the Shooters Party fits with the ridiculousness of this ongoing saga.

**Yes of course people are entitled to make a grievance. And they are entitled to have this grievance kept confidential. But 18 people making a "Group Complaint" was a political attack, not a grievance. According to Guy Rundle (and most Darebin branch members), Jim made the grievance public. Once it was public, it was no longer confidential.

16 April 2018

The best way for Alex Bhathal to get justice is in the hands of a Greens internal review. I am exiting stage left. I hope the review brings not only justice for Alex but also a sense of "closure" for all those wonderful Darebin Branch members who campaigned so hard during the by election.

As Bernie Sanders said: "When men and women stand together for justice, we win."

23 April 2018

Years ago, I worked as a nurse on Palm Island. Here, a young Aboriginal man was arrested for swearing at police. Less than an hour later he was dead. The initial internal investigation reported there was no sign of police brutality.

This is one of many examples of an internal investigation corrupted by privilege.

6 days before the deadline to the Batman by election review, the terms of reference indicate submissions will be accepted from Party members. The terms of reference have not been updated since they were changed at State Council on 14 April to include non-members and former members.

By not letting former members and non members know they are entitled to make a submission, the Party minimises the number of "critical" submissions. A similar technique is used to ration health services - don't let people know they are entitled to use them. Both are power games.

It is a worthy fight to ensure that a party built on the principles of social justice is committed to internal processes based on social justice. As Alicia Flynn said in The Age yesterday: "This is at the heart of what distinguished the Greens from the old parties."