

Tony Abbott's name is mud

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"Well, I can understand why just at the moment politicians aren't much trusted because we've had too many politicians who say one thing before an election to win votes and then do the opposite after the election..." -- Tony Abbott, Newcastle radio, June 13, 2013.



Tony Abbott

The Prime Minister is a liar. There is no point mincing words. We have never seen anything like it. With this budget he has shown himself to be cynically dishonest on a scale unprecedented in modern politics. Although Abbott is not the first political leader to break an election promise and will not be the last, no prime minister in memory, Liberal or Labor, has come even close to his contemptuous deception of the electorate he sucker-punched on Tuesday.

To a point, this is not surprising. All my adult life I have been lied to by the Tories, from the Vietnam war on down to John Howard's invention of the non-core promise. I was therefore expecting duplicity from Abbott. It's what people like him do, how they think, how they govern.

But it was genuinely shocking to see his wholesale abandonment of the bargain of candour to be expected between leader and people. Almost every significant commitment he made in the election campaign last year has been flung overboard or distorted beyond recognition.

"No cuts to education, no cuts to health, no change to pensions, no change to the GST and no cuts to the ABC or SBS." -- Tony Abbott, SBS NEWS, September 6, 2013

There are five separate betrayals in that lot alone. The most heinous is his full frontal assault upon Medicare, with even the poorest families forced to fork out a \$7 "co-payment" - as the euphemism goes - to see their GP, to get a pathology test, to have a CT scan, to fill a prescription. It's a tax from a government that promised no new taxes. Pay it, or join the ever-lengthening queue at your local hospital's emergency department, where Abbott has given them the green light to charge you as well.

In education, university fees will soar as they are thrown onto the open market. Stand by for the \$120,000 arts degree. This, despite Christopher "Poodles" Pyne's promise to Sky News on November 7 last year that " we're not going to raise fees ... I am not even considering it because we promised that we wouldn't."

But these two hits - gross as they are - pale against the enormity of the biggest surprise in this no-surprises budget, the government's decision to unload \$80 billion of health and education spending onto the states in the coming years.

It is the end of the Gonski education reforms. It is the shredding of the health care safety net by a Prime Minister who just weeks ago could proclaim, without batting an eyelid, that he was "the best friend Medicare has ever had".

The state and territory leaders - Tories all bar one - are livid. Mike Baird rightly called it " a kick in the guts for the people of NSW," and Queensland's Campbell Newman demanded an emergency COAG meeting. At which, no doubt, the states will howl for an increase in the GST. Eventually they will get it, expanded to catch food and anything else it does not hit now, and then hoicked to 12.5% by a prime minister who could boast in opposition:

"We are about reducing taxes, not increasing taxes. We are about getting rid of taxes, not imposing new taxes. This is my whole reason for being in politics, in the Parliament." -- Tony Abbott, November 20, 2012.

And on it goes. Up with the fuel excise, hitting you at the servo. Old people will fall back in the race against inflation. Eventually they will have to work to 70 to get the pension ; OK, perhaps, if you're an office worker. Frightening if you're on the tools, driving a truck, teaching infants, or nursing in intensive care.

The young unemployed are savagely bashed with the refusal of the dole for six months. The disabled are to be interrogated, yet again, to determine if they are cheating. The ABC, bludgeoned as well, will be forced to shed staff, cut programs and very probably close some of its foreign news bureaus. And that's before the so-called "efficiency dividend" is imposed. Goaded by the Murdoch press, the Liberals make no secret of their loathing for the ABC as a nest of lefty traitors. It is punishment politics at its most vindictive.

"This is a fair budget, everyone is doing his or her bit, including, dare I say it, politicians." -- Tony Abbott, Channel Ten, May 14.

If Labor had brought in a "deficit levy" on the wealthy - yes, another tax - the Tories and their clique of media toadies would have shrieked blue murder about socialist class warfare. Instead, they portray Abbott as a strong leader taking tough decisions to end a budget "emergency" they themselves invented.

Actually, someone on \$200,000 a year would pay around an extra \$210 in tax, the cost of a business lunch. And the politicians' wage freeze is derisory. On \$507,000 a year, Abbott is one of the world's best paid leaders, doing rather better than Barack Obama earning the equivalent of \$425,000 or, say, the Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, who scrapes by on \$161,000.

With Orwellian deceit, Abbott insists that "we have fundamentally kept faith with the Australian people". In fact, he and Smokin' Joe Hockey have brought down an oppressive, grasping budget. It is not so much a fiscal document as a political tract, driven by a brutal conservative ideology in which ordinary people are lashed to the wheels of "the market" and conscripted to serve an economy which should be serving them.

It is a delicious irony that Abbott has destroyed the faith the voters placed in him. Endlessly blackguarding Julia Gillard for her broken carbon tax promise and trumpeting himself as a paragon

of probity, he raised the bar.

On Tuesday he fell beneath it, face down in the mud, and will never be trusted again.

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