

Clear, direct and unemotional, Banks explores her former party's empty heart — and Achilles' heel

Julia Banks is no sympathetic martyr of the Me Too cause, but her new book does well to highlight the Liberal Party's role in enabling and covering up abuse.



Former MP Julia Banks has dropped her long-promised bucket on the federal Liberal Party and the results, so far, have been much as you'd expect.

Three narratives dominate the media's reporting on her new book, *Power Play*: support for or criticism of Banks herself, along political lines; the guessing game about the owner of the "[wandering hand](#)"; and the role played by the dark eminence of Scott Morrison in Banks' story of betrayal.

Banks isn't a sympathetic martyr of the Me Too cause. She speaks like the corporate lawyer she was; clear, direct, unemotional. The minute calculation of what she will and won't choose to reveal has been thought through. This gives her target — the party — room for a pincer attack on her motivations and credibility.

One wing of the assault is the "why now, why no names, she's just a sore loser" trope. The other is the reactionary's go-to: "that's not my experience".

As John Howard happily discounted the 76% of Australians who think we're a racist country with those words, so Greg Hunt and sundry other talking heads can use them to label Banks a liar without saying she lied.

As to which conscienceless senior cabinet minister sexually harassed Banks, does the predator's identity matter? Yes, in the sense that gee it'd be nice if we had a ministry that didn't include alleged sex offenders, but that's as likely to happen as a federal anti-corruption body until we get a properly hung parliament putting the crossbench in power.

On Morrison, Banks has again been precise for effect, calling the prime minister "constant, menacing, background wallpaper, imperceptibly controlling his obliging intermediaries to do his work for him".

Banks knows what she's doing, and it isn't just about maximising sales of her book (although it isn't not that either). She is pointing to the least-observed and rarely addressed leg of the three-cornered stool that makes up institutional abuse: the organism of enablement and cover-up.

The other two parts are the perpetrator and the victim. We talk and legislate a lot for the predators, the (mostly) men who commit sexual violence on (mostly) women and children. We have learned to recognise that they can be most readily found in institutional settings, because that is where systemic power imbalances are grown, cultivated and preserved. Largely we talk about detection and punishment, because rotten apples are an easier construct than a diseased tree.

Lately we've also focused heavily on the victims, shamed into it by the royal commission into child abuse and the Me Too movement. We are encouraging them to speak, although we're a long way from offering anything useful in return; so far, just celebrity and retraumatisation.

Perpetrators and victims are endlessly renewable resources, as long as institutions do what they do and have always done.

Morrison is amoral, I think that's no longer controversial. As newly-minted prime minister when Banks decided to quit the party, he tried to monster, wheedle and manipulate her into conforming to his political needs. It was entirely in character.

However, he was prime minister when she walked, not when she was victimised. He wasn't in charge of the ministry or the Liberal Party's culture when Banks was being subjected to routine sexism, ageism, misogyny and harassment at the hands of the people she had thought were her ideological roommates but who turned out to be a bunch of neanderthal thugs.

When Banks was sexually harassed in plain sight by a senior cabinet minister, the party leader was Malcolm Turnbull. He, famously, instituted the bonk ban in an attempt to keep Barnaby Joyce in one paddock at a time. He also, less famously, made Christian Porter attorney-general when he'd already heard about the alleged incident involving Porter and a female staffer at Canberra's Public Bar.

Banks points squarely at Morrison as chief enabler of misogyny and coordinator of the cover-up, for what had happened to her. That may be so, but to expect anything else of him would be bizarre given his track record of failure to stand up for anything except the alleged sex offenders in his own government.

Morrison is just the latest, and least ethical, custodian of the rotted-out institution that is more and more literally becoming the Liberal Party. The party that just preselected, to replace Andrew Laming, Henry Pike — a guy who is only discernibly an improvement on Laming in that [his misogynistic behaviour](#) is already on public record.

Whether this was obvious to Banks the minute she joined the party, perhaps she'll explain. She should be respected for holding a light to the sordid reality she found, and she may encourage other women in that and other political parties to do the same. The predators she has declined to name will continue to operate in plain sight until replaced by others no better and potentially worse.

That will continue until the party decides that its corporate interests are meaningless if Banks' experience continues to be the norm. No story better than hers illustrates the Liberal Party's empty heart.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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