

Born again Gillard on the old foggy bandwagon



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Fresh back from the United States where she announced her undying love for America, the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, let us in on a secret no one could have guessed. She is an old-fashioned traditionalist.

In an interview for *Australian Agenda* on Sky News, Gillard declared she opposed euthanasia, opposed gay marriage, and wanted people to study the Bible. She doesn't sound too different from Tony Abbott. He is a one-time Catholic seminarian – now married with children – who deeply opposes euthanasia and abortion. She is an atheist who keeps her unmarried partner in the Lodge. But when it comes to traditional family values Gillard wants you to know they are Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

I sat opposite Gillard for a decade in the House of Representatives and it never occurred to me – not for a minute – that she was a moral conservative. But she was ... or is.

Why has she done this now?

Well it turns out that Labor research shows the government is suffering in the polls because people think it gets its marching orders from the Greens and Bob Brown. They think it is pandering to a group with some pretty far-out demands they didn't vote for – like a new tax on carbon dioxide designed to increase electricity and petrol prices.

So Labor and Gillard want to show they are more mainstream than the Greens. As Gillard put it: "To our right we have the Liberal Party ... climate change deniers ... To our left we have the Greens." So what do you get when you cross Tony Abbott and Bob Brown? You get Julia Gillard as their political love child.

We all know in the genetic lottery of life, offspring cannot choose which characteristics they derive from which parent. If Julia had taken Bob's moral views with Tony's environmental policy, she could dump the new tax while maintaining a more liberal posi-

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tion on gay marriage and the like. That seems to be the way the faceless men, Labor right-wing powerbrokers like Mark Arbib, want her to go. But you can't pick your moral beliefs, can you? Moral convictions do not turn on the spin of political convenience.

The last Labor leader who paraded on morality was Kevin Rudd. He championed an emissions trading system as the great moral issue of the age. When it looked like being the death of him Gillard advised him to drop it, which he did, shortly before it *was* the death of him. At that stage Gillard was not so committed to saving the world from carbon dioxide. And during the election she did all that she could to reassure people she was no fanatic, declaring last August: "There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead."

But that was then. She now wants a carbon tax as a step along the road to an emissions trading system: the very system she urged Rudd to drop. She has found faith, the environmental faith. In an evil world burning fossil fuel a great warming catastrophe awaits us (as hot as the fires of hell itself) which can only be averted through repentance, and the good works of an emissions trading scheme. This is a faith that needs no god. It is a faith for progressive atheists and Christians alike.

So the Gillard of 2011 is right now where the Rudd of 2010 was. I'll tell you someone who has noticed: Rudd himself. He popped up last week to remind everyone that when he was suffering for the (environmental) faith Gillard was dumping it. He wants people to know that he does not chop and change. He is principled.

If you listened to Rudd you might think Gillard is not so sincere about her views, that perhaps even her newly disclosed belief in traditional family values is just political positioning. I'll concede that politicians do change their mind and change their policies. But usually they are firm in their convictions on moral issues. That's why the parties give them a conscience vote. It's too much to expect MPs to bend positions of conscience to the will of the party line. People could get very cynical if they thought their leaders chop and change these values for a passing political advantage.

Peter Costello is the former Liberal treasurer.