

Special Victorian Parliamentary Liberal Party Meeting: 10am, 27 March 2023 in Opposition Party Room.

Attendance:

1. Anne Marie
2. Wendy
3. Wayne
4. Ryan
5. James
6. Bridget
7. Matt
8. Bill
9. Brad
10. Chris
11. Nick
12. Brad R
13. Michael O
14. Roma
15. Richard
16. Bev
17. Moira
18. Kim
19. Matt
20. Georgie
21. Trung
22. Joe
23. Cindy
24. Evan
25. Jess
26. Sam
27. David Southwick
28. John
29. David Hodgett
30. Renee Heath
31. David Davis

Meeting opened at 10am

John Pesutto: thanked everyone for coming. Housekeeping: motion was emailed last Monday, and everyone has had a chance to consider it.

John Pesutto: proposed a secret ballot. Three scrutineers: One for John, one for Moira and a third scrutineer as witness. Everyone is present. It will need 16 votes to pass

John Pesutto: I won't read the motion - you all have that. It's been a difficult week. I can only assure you as I did last Tuesday that I would never have brought this forward unless I had to. I never would have put my leadership to this type of test unless I absolutely had to do it. If we are to be a winning force, then we have to be true to what we have been telling ourselves we are going to do. We need to be professional and focused. We need Victoria to see we are reliable and focused. Unless we take this step we are proposing today, we cannot do that. We will not be seen as a viable option. It's only been a short time since I have had the pleasure of leading and we have started to make gains. Every time we get a run and start landing blows, we get drawn away from it and that is serious. It leads to brand damage. I want to assure you that I do firmly believe that there is space in the Liberal Party for a whole range of views. We have to have in mind that it's not just our colleagues but the state that has entrusted us to leading. There is room in our house for a broad range of views. The decision that I am asking you to take today as a collective is leadership. This is a tough decision, there is nothing personal in it.

We have issues that we need to prosecute: Cost of living, energy prices. If we can't do this, I wonder if we are up to what is required. I was at pains to work through the issues as I did last weekend. I know what sacrifices you have made. This pathway is to make sure your sacrifices are worth it. The leadership I'm offering is one that says I want to win.

This is the first of many tough decisions we are going to have to make if we want to win.

He spoke for 10 minutes.

Richard Riordan: On Tuesday I, along with others believed that there was a third option in dealing with this. We have all been put in this room with the same position, as equals – we are all entitled to be here. Expulsion is a very last result. (Richard spoke to the constitution and notice of motion). Even the ABC cannot prove the allegations of neo Nazi sympathies. We are not here to disagree with our leader, this isn't about leadership. The motion raises two issues: neo Nazi sympathies and hate against the trans community. Neither have been able to be proven. We cannot kick her out of the Party Room on two unjustifiable lies. Moira's legal case against us is massively strong. If we are going to get rid of a strong, young woman that has joined our ranks, I am devastated at the consequences of this motion.

Bev McArthur: Needless to say I would urge everyone not to support this motion. This is one of the hardest days of my life. This is the most devastating day of my life. I lost my son five years ago today, and if this wasn't something extremely important, I would be on a plane on the way to Scotland to attend the funeral of my late son's godmother. I will always stand for women's rights. If I hadn't been in Sydney at a women's conference, I would have been there with Moira fighting for the rights of women. I am here for women and young girls so they are safe. We must stand up for women. We had a chance to stand for women when men in black came and hijacked a women's rally. This is not about your leadership, John. You have set out to expel a woman in this party. People have emailed in, there have been flurries of emails to support Moira. We look stupid. If we are to be a Party that embraces all views, then we must be sure that we advocate for the views of 50% of the population. A lot of Moira's supporters are lesbians, and they are the ones that are getting attacked. If we spent our energy fighting ideas, not personalities we will be a winning force. We are all entitled to a different opinion, and we are entitled to voice it. Please do not make us go down the path of socialism.

Brad Battin: John, you said some things about leadership. We all need to move forward. This should not have been debated in the media. I went out of my way to talk to the police crew that were involved in this process. Victoria Police knew one of the men in that group. He is a known Nazi. They have big restrictions in what they can do. There was no Nazi symbols. Laws did not allow them to move them on. The most violent group was a trans group, not the women's group. The next day the Victoria Police were taken aside by the GLOW (gay and lesbian organization of witwatersrand), we need the full details of that process. There is an opportunity to come up with another option other than expulsion.

We need to come together and know what the standards are. I have been here in Parliament for 12 years and I have never had those conversations. It must be a line in the sand. We must know what we are allowed to attend and what we are not allowed to attend.

Georgie Crozier: As I said on Tuesday nobody wants this. Not one of us wants to be in this room today but we are because of a scenario that has arisen.

Over the past few weeks there has been some things that Moira has said. Everyone knows that Moira has stood for these things for many, many years. She has a public profile. When she made her inaugural speech there were some issues and John and I spoke to her. We came into this party room as equals. We spoke about the sensitives around these issues. We tried to provide advice around the issues that were raised. You might have been an activist before you were in Parliament but now, you're an MP. We are all MP's surely; we should understand basic standards.

I didn't hear the women's day speech, I understand it was about the rally. Then the rally happened. You knew what you were walking into. David Southwick reached out and said we need to deal with this and there was nothing – defiance again. There was no understanding about what needs to be done. This isn't about a women's issue, it's not about freedom of speech, this is a pattern. There is a pattern of defiance and not taking advice. I am sorry about that Moira because I have come to you and wanted to help you and nothing. This is about leadership. I urge you to support this motion.

Ryan Smith: In response to Georgie's commentary. It's not about those things. It's about the two things right here (held up motion paper). The reasons that Georgie raised are not here. All the issues that are being put forward, are not on the motion. Georgie signed this and she hasn't put any of this on the motion. There are 2 issues – if you believe in them, support the motion.

David Davis: That is a little bit simplistic, Ryan. It's in Georgie's rights to put forward these points. There is motion there but there is also a context.

Kim Wells: I don't know whether I'm sad or angry to have gotten to this point. After the last loss I thought we were taking a new direction. Instead of shooting ourselves in the foot – we are shooting ourselves in the head. We don't respect everyone's views. I thought that's what the Liberal Party was all about. I cannot believe how badly this has been handled, John

Chris Crewther: (Read from his notes and will provide notes). The neo Nazis were not invited and were not welcome. I oppose neo Nazis. We must push against guilt by association. This could happen to any of us. This will make members afraid to stand up for what they believe in. Any of us could be Moira one day. Federally – we always got behind each other when things came up. Discipline is needed and this can be done in different ways. We don't know what we are allowed to attend, and what we are not allowed to attend. To be told after, is not fair. This will only further divide our party. I encourage the colleagues to oppose this motion.

Joe McCracken: I love the Liberal Party, but I hate this situation. I hate it beyond belief. When I had my maiden speech, there was a lot of people who supported me, they supported me and they reached and Moira came up to me and looked me square in the eyes and said "Joe, I am proud of you". They are not the words of someone who hates gays or lesbians. During that time, I saw Moira for who she was. I am put in an impossible situation now because I am made to choose between two people I respect. Whichever way this vote goes, it's going to be crap. I don't even want to walk out there. We need to find another option that saves face for John but saves Moira.

Renee Heath: I want to explain why I am not only supporting Moira, but why I am strongly supporting her. There is a toxic culture in this Party, and it must change. I think that often people wait for someone to slip up and then they use that to settle scores. I don't believe that it is the extreme left, or the extreme right that keeps us in opposition – it is extreme division. That must change now. Everyone knew that Moira was attending that rally and I think that the minute the Nazis showed up, certain people said, "we have got her – let's link her to that". The Nazis had nothing to do with Moira and she condemned them straight away, yet some people jumped on the opportunity to get rid of her. Also, I think that others have thought "well, if John loses this vote – we have got him" and they will use it to get rid of him. It needs to end. We should keep Moira and keep John. John, you mentioned that this will be the first of many tough decisions, quite frankly – I don't want to be the next tough decision. What are we allowed to go to? I think we must remember that it is the same right that allows us to go to a pride rally, or a women's rally. It should be up to the individual what they want to attend. In terms of the treatment of Moira – I think it is horrible. I thought we would have learnt after what the Party did to me. I know what it is like to be terrified because the leadership in this party has thrown me under the bus and it still continues today because the leadership will not correct the record. I know what it is like to be followed and to have drones over my place and to be told by this party to "just not go home". I wasn't allowed home during that time because it was dangerous, and I was advised not to come to Melbourne either. I was scared when it was me in a similar position, but for Moira, it is her and her family you are putting in danger, both Moira and I have been physically assaulted in the city in the last month. Where is the outrage over that? I am asking you, for the safety of women in this party – do not support this motion.

Matt Bach: I have found this so incredibly hard. I found last weekend that this is a necessary step. We cannot be wedded to extremists. I urge you to support the motion.

Nick McGowan: I share Kim's initial feelings. I cannot understand what we are doing as human beings to be quite honest. I read the motion; I do not agree for a minute that Moira is a neo Nazi. We will all make mistakes. If this motion is successful today, you are actually labelling someone a

Nazi. Moira is going to have to live with that. It's like calling someone a murderer, a rapist, or a paedophile. Substance is key because there is not a penalty that is worse than this. Most people's minds are probably made up and that is the saddest thing. You must maintain an open mind right until the end. If Moira had been told that she couldn't go to the rally and she did, I might be able to support this motion – but that didn't happen.

David Hodgett: Sadly, this issue has become a vote for one, or for the other when the majority in the room probably want both. I spent quite a bit of time with Moira this week and I am sure she would do things differently if we had our time again, and so would the leadership. A lot of us are pissed off that we are placed in this position where we have to choose one or the other. I cannot believe that the 31 of us in this room cannot find a sensible way forward. I urge that we find a sensible way forward. Some of the behaviour on both sides was absolutely appalling.

Anne Marie Hermans: This has been an extremely tough week. It's been horrible. Everyone knows I love Johns leadership. I want to see him as the next premier. This is horrible for everyone and surely we can find another way through this.

David Southwick: I was unsure whether I should speak because I know when I speak people say to me that I'm too close to it. I want to thank Chris and Renee for calling those men for what they were, which is neo Nazis. I don't think Moira is a Nazi. I haven't said that I will not say that. She is not in any way, but we are Members of Parliament. When something is wrong, we need to do what is needed to be able to fix it. I don't accept that sitting on the couch talking about conspiracy theories is calling that out. If the Nazis hadn't showed up, we wouldn't be in this room. Couch conversations, having champagne and talking about conspiracy theories is calling it out. It is not acceptable to change your profile picture to have a Barbie doll dressed as a Nazi. I took John on Sunday to the Holocaust centre. We didn't make it a media thing – Joe a 92 Holocaust and said, "please don't allow this to happen again".

What should have happened on that couch is "there were Nazis that crashed a rally". Those Nazis weren't coming after Jews, they were coming after trans. It's not about Jews. It's about anyone who is not them. We are MP's who need to call it out.

John Pesutto: The problem is we could not get a concession from Moira.

Ryan Smith: asked "so there is no room for compromise in this room?"

John Pesutto: "Not at this stage, no."

Moira Deeming: The email that I wrote to you all, outlined what my experience was on Saturday. I emailed you a letter from my lawyer addressing the dossier. I immediately apologised. Moira will provide a copy of her speech. **See attached.**

John Pesutto announced meeting suspended from 11:33 until 11:40

11:56am. Meeting called to order. We have reached a compromise. People have been moved

The promised compromise –

- Moira to be suspended from the party room for 9 months effective from this meeting
- Joint statement from the leader's office in conjunction with Moira
- A media statement - this statement will make it clear that no one was accusing Moira of being a Nazi, or Nazi sympathiser.

Agreed but not with a unanimous show of hands. Support was sort for the agreement as negotiated between Moira, the leadership, and others. It was put to the room for support of the agreement, quite a number in the room raised their hands, but it was not unanimous.