



# Helpful Abbott stirs the pot

**Mark Skulley**

Tony Abbott moved to play down opinion polls showing Kevin Rudd would be a stronger competitor for the Coalition than Julia Gillard as he lapped up Labor's leadership woes yesterday.

The Fairfax Nielsen poll published on Saturday showed Mr Rudd was the preferred prime minister of 58 per cent of people polled compared with 38 per cent for Mr Abbott. Other polls showed similar differences.

But the Opposition Leader gave an abrupt response yesterday when asked which opponent he would prefer. "Well, it's not about me and frankly it shouldn't be all about Kevin or Julia, either . . . it's absolutely crystal clear from the hatreds that have been on public display over the past few days that whoever wins tomorrow, the poison doesn't go away," he said.

Mr Abbott was greeted by the aroma of arabica coffee beans and the whiff of an early election when he visited a family-owned manufacturing business in Melbourne.

He and his wife Margie were given a quick tour through the Beraldo cof-

fee roasting plant in Heidelberg, north-east of central Melbourne, before heading back to Canberra to await the outcome of the Labor leadership challenge today.

The owner of the business, Paul Beraldo, asked if Mr Abbott had ever made a fresh coffee. "I have done a lot of watching," the Coalition leader replied. "I might have trouble doing this again without your assistance."

And then it was down to business. Mr Abbott said Beraldo's annual power bill of about \$20,000 would rise by about \$2000 under the federal government's carbon tax, his umpteenth attack on the policy.

"It doesn't matter who wins on Monday, there will still be a carbon tax," he said. "It will be a carbon tax based on a lie under Julia Gillard or a carbon fiddle based on a lie under Kevin Rudd."

"Only an election can bring the strong and stable government that Australia needs and finally I say to the independent members of Parliament: you gave us this mess, you fix it. You are responsible for this government. You ring this curtain down on

this shambles by moving no confidence in this government this week."

He may have given an early insight into the Liberal television campaign for the next election by quoting approvingly from the warring Labor leaders. It seems Mr Rudd was right in arguing that the "faceless men" were running the Labor Party and that dysfunction in the government was damaging the country.

"What we've seen over the last few days is Julia Gillard confirming everything the Coalition has ever said about Kevin Rudd and Kevin Rudd confirming everything the Coalition has ever said about Julia Gillard."

"She told us back in June of 2010 that 'a good government had lost its way' when in fact a hopeless government was completely paralysed. How do we know? Because she told us."

Mr Abbott was less forthright when asked if he would move a no-confidence motion in the government when Parliament resumed this week.

"The issue is not one for us," he argued. "It's for the independents who put her there."



Tony Abbott at a coffee plant yesterday . . . the whiff of an early election.

Photo: ARSINEH HOUSPIAN