



# Eight plotters, one Volvo: how to stage a coup

EXCLUSIVE

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On a cool Sunday evening five weeks ago, Malcolm Turnbull pulled up in his Volvo station wagon and followed a path to the front door of a large home in Queanbeyan set on a bush block. He rang the doorbell, then crossed the threshold to his destiny.

It was September 13 and inside the house, just a 15-minute drive from Parliament House in Canberra, a group of MPs from the Left and Right wings of the Liberal Party had gathered — focused activists now — for a leadership spill to sever Tony Abbott from the prime ministership.

This was the penultimate moment. It was a final opportunity to weigh up numbers, test assumptions, refine a cascade of scenarios, consider the danger points and count — yet again — those who were certain to vote for Turnbull, those likely to vote for him and those who would vote for Abbott. In between lay uncertainties, but the scales had tipped irrevocably towards the removal of Abbott. They had the numbers now.

Turnbull was in striking distance of a dream that had shaped his life for decades.

The gravity of the situation weighed heavily in the air. All in the room were sombre. But they were pragmatists and this was a night for practical decisions. They were preparing to intervene brutally

in a democratically elected government with an ambush against Australia's 28th prime minister.

Sharing the light supper on the table that night at the home of Peter Hendy, local member for

Eden-Monaro, were eight men: Turnbull; Hendy; Arthur Sinodinos, a leader in the campaign to remove Abbott from power who had long ago lost faith in the PM; James McGrath, a Queensland senator, key numbers man and one-time Tory campaign adviser in Britain who had been close to Turnbull for years; senator Scott Ryan, once a bitter Turnbull detractor who had now lost faith in Abbott; senator Mitch Fifield, a dry from Victoria who had resigned from the frontbench in 2009 in protest against Turnbull's position on climate-change policy and had voted against a spill motion for the leadership in February; and Queensland MPs Mal Brough and Wyatt Roy, both of whom had backed the spill motion in February — the first step in the eight-month march by Abbott to the edge of the cliff.

When the group parted that night they had crossed the Rubicon. They had weighed every possibility, they had plans and back-up plans; they had tested the numbers, once, twice and thrice. Those among them who had wanted to rush in earlier had been forced to wait; those with more cautious voices were now prepared to move.

Turnbull himself would mull

*Continued on Page 10*



Malcolm Turnbull in the silver Volvo stationwagon he drove to the secret meeting the night before the coup