

Danger in handing keys to the city to Liberals

SMH 25 August 2016

COMMENT Edward Mandla

Much has been said about the problems of the NSW Liberal Party. Its factional hijacking is now all pervasive and beyond the influence of the Premier. You don't have to search widely for examples.



Councillor Edward Mandla is speaking out against the stranglehold of powerbrokers in the Liberal Party Photo: Supplied

In local government, in which the Premier is heavily invested, you would hope the Liberals sent their best and brightest to Sydney's Town Hall to represent Australia's only world city and the hub of its cultural and economic life; that they would remember that in a two-party system, with power comes responsibility. But the reality is they have not.

The City of Sydney Liberal "team" handpicked by lobbyists and powerbrokers deserves scrutiny. The *Herald* has taken the first look under the covers with its story [about the background](#) of the man who is managing the campaign of the Liberal candidate for lord mayor.

But scrutiny should not stop there. From a Ryde councillor determined to serve both Ryde and Sydney simultaneously to the spouse of a sacked state minister, the team represents more of a group of Liberal Party diehards and lackeys than a team of serious policy makers with the independence and fortitude to hold off paid influence peddlers and party heavies.

Handing the keys to the city to the Liberal Party on September 10 would be to hand them to vested interests who have the ability to pay for policy.

As a former Liberal and a current councillor of the City of Sydney, I know what it's like to be beholden to "faceless men", many of whom view the city as little more than a bauble of power. I was asked on many occasions to advocate for the shrinking of the City of Sydney electoral boundaries, not unlike what we have seen before, which would have the inevitable result of alienating residents, giving the Liberal government of the day an edge at the ballot box.

In 2014, one of the key Liberal faceless men asked me to write a paper detailing such a plan. As an experienced local councillor, I knew this paper was wrong for the community. Sydney has flourished to become more than the CBD. It is now a cutting-edge metropolis where people want to work, live and play. A place where there is a symbiotic relationship with business and residents.

That I wanted no part in this plan cut no ice with the faceless men. It was pulled from my hands and pushed into the media within hours. It has rightly been lampooned as a bald-faced attempt to manipulate the boundaries of the city for electoral advantage.

Like the power of the NSW factional organisers, the idea of shrinking Sydney will not easily go away. No doubt it will be an agenda item in the parliamentary inquiry into local government elections, which happens after each election. There will be other independent papers presented and eminent experts in support.

The fight against poor policy, factions, lobbyists and vested interests can only take place at the ballot box. Parties only reform after they lose office and get sent to the wilderness. Increasingly voters are learning that it pays to look beyond the "How to Vote" card and read the fine print. That's why we're seeing the rise of independents as the candidate on offer represents "what you see is what you get".

The only antidote to the stranglehold of powerbrokers on major parties is the genuine candidate competition that results from broad plebiscites. The resistance to such reform is proof there is much to lose.

Edward Mandla is a Sydney Matters Independent Team candidate for the City of Sydney council elections.