Tom Hughes sounded warning on switch from son-in-law Malcolm Turnbull to 'lunatic' Tony Abbott in 2009

www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/federal-election-2016/tom-hughes-sounded-warning-on-switch-from-soninlaw-malcolm-turnbull-to-lunatic-tony-abbott-in-2009-20160602-gpaic7.html

Fergus Hunter

June 3, 2016 - 8:26AM

Tony Abbott replaced Malcolm Turnbull as Liberal leader in Decemer 2009. *Photo: Alex Ellinghausen*

- Federal election 2016: News, analysis, video
- Abbott not expecting 'advancement' in future Coalition cabinet

Malcolm Turnbull's father-in-law, former attorney-general Tom Hughes, called Tony Abbott a "lunatic" and urged Mr Turnbull to stay in politics after losing the Liberal leadership in 2009, predicting the party's "folly" would pass.

> *To elect Abbott in his place is the equivalent of putting the bull in charge of the china shop.*
>
> *Tom Hughes*

In a letter to his brother, prominent art critic Robert Hughes, the giant of the Australian legal fraternity said making Mr Abbott leader was akin to putting "the principal lunatic in charge of the asylum" and predicted it would be a "potentially catastrophic decision".

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, former attorney-general and prominent barrister Tom Hughes QC and daughter Lucy Turnbull earlier this year. *Photo: MICK TSIKAS*

In a separate note to Mr Turnbull, who married Mr Hughes' businesswoman daughter Lucy 36 years ago, he said "there is room only for improvement and the party's present folly will pass".

The revelations are contained in a new biography of Mr Hughes by historian Ian Hancock, called *Tom Hughes QC: A Cab on the Rank*, to be published this week.

The scathing commentary and predictions of his son-in-law's return to power from December 2009 would ultimately be vindicated, although the wait was long. Six years after he wrote the letters, Mr Turnbull was back in the leadership after the Abbott government was characterised by chaos and dysfunction.

In the letter to his brother, Mr Hughes said that Mr Turnbull "paid the price" for his erstwhile support for an emissions trading scheme in the face of his party's opposition. He said it was "to his great credit" that he stood up for his principles.

"To elect Abbott in his place is the equivalent of putting the bull in charge of the china shop or the principal lunatic in charge of the asylum," Mr Hughes wrote.

"Abbott's behaviour in relation to the risks of global warming may be compared to the oscillations of the weather vane."

Since rising to the leadership, the now Prime Minister has publicly embraced Mr Abbott's Direct Action climate policy, which he once criticised as an "environmental figleaf to cover determination to do nothing" and a "recipe for fiscal recklessness".

Follow Fergus Hunter on Facebook

Follow us on Twitter

Mr Hughes as attorney-general.