

Is Scott Morrison really the best the Liberal Party can do?

By John Passant

11 September 2018



Prime Minister Morrison describes replacing sitting Prime Minister Turnbull as about ensuring the Coalition puts its "best foot forward" at the next election. Canberra correspondent [John Passant](#) reports.

SCOTT MORRISON'S first appearance as Prime Minister in Question Time on Monday (10 September) was revealing for what it did not reveal.

Opposition Leader [Bill Shorten](#) asked the new Prime Minister why PM Malcolm Turnbull had been removed:

"Malcolm Turnbull is no longer prime minister of Australia. Why?"

The Prime Minister explained that the leadership was determined by the Liberal Party and they had elected him.

This was, as Bill Shorten pointed out, an explanation of how Morrison became Prime Minister, not why. In his second answer, the Prime Minister hinted at the real reason. It was, he said, about ensuring the Government put its "best foot forward" at the next election.

So there we have it. In the warped world of Liberal Party Parliamentarians, Scott Morrison has a better chance of leading the Government to victory than Malcolm Turnbull. Of course, the reality is that almost half the Liberal Party room thought Home Affairs Minister [Peter Dutton](#) would do a better job than Turnbull. Only just over half the Liberal members thought Morrison would do a better job than Dutton and, by inference, Turnbull.

"Having begun Question Time as Prime Minister, Morrison finished it sounding like Prime Muppet." [@gpaddymaning](#) traces [#qt](#)'s swift decline from civility to farce today: [#auspol](#) <https://t.co/7XUTNlfNv4>

— The Monthly (@THEMONTHLY)
[September 10, 2018](#)

On a [two-party preferred vote of 44% for the Coalition compared to Labor's 56%](#), Monday's Newspoll suggests otherwise. If people voted this way at the next election, [Labor would win in a landslide](#).

Some media have been making much of the fact that, according to this

Newspoll, Scott Morrison beats Bill Shorten as the preferred prime minister. It goes with the job. It is the recognition of being the prime minister that affords an advantage over your opponent. Psephologist, [Kevin Boreham](#), has suggested this recognition factor gives the incumbent a [16% house advantage](#). On that basis, Morrison's lead over Shorten as preferred prime minister disappears. When viewed in this light, then, the preferred PM result combined with the two-party preferred poll result shows us that Morrison is a well-recognised loser.

Of course, the real reason that the conservative forces tore Prime Minister Turnbull down in a grab for power, will remain hidden. That group of around 40 Liberal Parliamentarians lives in such a bubble that they seriously thought Dutton would give them a better chance of retaining government than Turnbull or Morrison.

Deputy Opposition Leader [@tanya_plibersek](#): During his time as Treasurer, [@ScottMorrisonMP](#) cut health, cut education, tried to cut the pension – all in order to give the big banks a \$17 billion tax cut.

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The other problem that Morrison has is that, as

Treasurer, he has been the architect of much of the economic angst that has seen Australian voters consistently reject this Coalition Government in the last 40 consecutive polls.

Dorothy Dixers from Government backbenchers elicited a set of slogans about jobs, a booming economy, lower electricity prices, helping farmers and stopping the boats. It is a losing strategy. As people struggle to make ends meet but see the big end of town making more and more money, they will continue to switch off.

Labor raised questions on the flurry of leaks about infrastructure, Catholic school funding and taxes. They also asked whether ministers who supported Turnbull on Monday, Dutton on Tuesday, Turnbull on Wednesday, Dutton on Thursday and Morrison on Friday had misled the Parliament. Funny, but not substantive.

Watch out [@ScottMorrisonMP](#), [@mathiascormann](#) was just asked how he could declare that, “I 100 per cent support Scott Morrison and Josh Frydenberg” nine days after he gave Malcolm Turnbull the same 100 per cent guarantee. His answer? You can trust him until you can't... [#SenateQT](#)

pic.twitter.com/hlkqhWqq07

— Senator Glenn Sterle (@GlennSterle)
[September 10, 2018](#)

The better focus for their "misleading Parliament" questions was Peter Dutton. Had he misled the Parliament back in March this year when he answered a question from Greens MP [Adam Bandt](#)?

As the Guardian's Lisa Martin [put it](#):

'On 27 March, ... Bandt asked Dutton in question time to categorically rule out "any personal connection or any other relationship between you and the intended employer of either of the au pairs".

'Dutton responded: "The answer is yes."'

This has yet to fully play out, but it appears Dutton may have known one of the intended employers from his days as a policeman in the Queensland police force.

In response to a question yesterday from Bandt, the Prime Minister ruled out sacking Dutton. Morrison denied Dutton had misled the Parliament.

The other tack from Labor in relation to Dutton was whether his stake in a trustee company that operates two childcare centres which receive government subsidies is an office of profit under the Crown. If so, Dutton is ineligible to sit in Parliament and his decisions since October 2016, [according to Labor's legal advice, may be challengeable](#). Imagine the chaos if a challenge to any of his thousands of decisions as a Minister includes the [Section 44](#) Constitutional argument.

The Government will not refer Dutton to the High Court to clarify his eligibility to sit in Parliament. The Prime Minister and Attorney-General [Porter](#) both defended Dutton, arguing that the Solicitor-General [Donaghue](#) had advised there was no breach of Section 44. That is true, but the Solicitor-General said much the

same thing about
former Deputy PM
[Barnaby Joyce](#).

The Government has
to defend Dutton. With
Malcolm Turnbull now
out of Parliament, it is
technically in a minority
and depends even
more on the
crossbench for
survival. On top of that,
if Morrison does not
protect Dutton on both
the eligibility and
misleading Parliament
issues, the pro-Dutton
forces would destroy
the Government right
now.

Some readers might
be so unkind as to
think that the Dutton
challenge to Turnbull
and the rise of
Morrison to the prime
ministership has
already done that.

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