

It takes Malcolm Turnbull a year to do nothing as prime minister

Andrew Bolt, The Courier-Mail, August 8, 2016
Subscriber only

It is 11 months since Malcolm Turnbull became Prime Minister. What on earth has he done in all that time?

Last September, Turnbull said Tony Abbott had to be sacked because “ultimately, the prime minister has not been capable of providing the economic leadership our nation needs”. But in the 11 months since Turnbull took over, name one thing of substance he has achieved.

Name one single thing that Turnbull has done that makes your lives better. Makes your future safer. Hello?

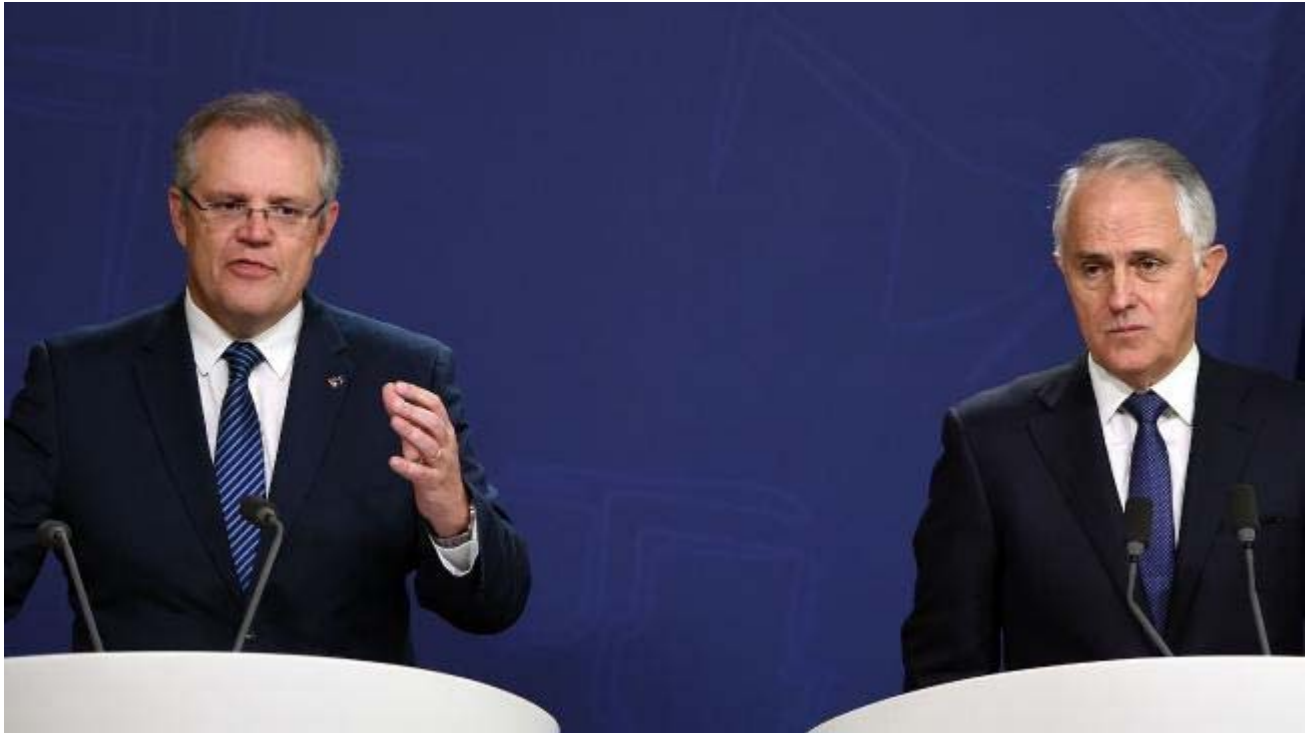
Now consider this: the media pack that supported Turnbull for so long used to say Tony Abbott was a failure. A dud. Yet after just one year as prime minister, Abbott, that failure, had already scrapped the mining tax that was hurting investment, and scrapped the carbon tax which had sent your electricity bills soaring.

He'd also signed huge free-trade deals with Japan and South Korea, and saved billions of dollars by reforming Labor's out-of-control national broadband network. And, of course, he'd stopped the boats that had brought 50,000 illegal immigrants to Australia and caused the deaths of 1200 boat people. By the way, that's just a partial list.

But Turnbull? What has he done?

Last week, I even spent a whole hour on 3AW asking listeners to phone in a list of Turnbull triumphs. The best that anyone could suggest was that he'd freed independent truckies from new rules that would have forced some to increase charges, or go out of business. Good, but small beer.

Others suggested Turnbull had at least promised to spend \$50 billion to build 12 submarines in Adelaide, but this is just a plan and not a deed. Worse, this is scandal, not a success. This decision — made to save Liberal seats in South Australia — is estimated to cost perhaps \$10 billion more than submarines bought overseas.



Scott Morrison and Malcolm Turnbull reveal banks will face an annual parliamentary committee.

Of course, Turnbull still has a month to go before his first year is up — but don't expect a sudden rush of activity. After all, Turnbull does not want parliament to sit again until August 30. That means the government won't pass any laws or reforms until September at the very earliest. In fact, Turnbull hasn't even started to get his first Budget through parliament yet, two months after it was announced.

So despite Turnbull's promise last September, he has shown zero leadership for almost a year. Yet how desperately we need some. Australia's living standards have fallen for more than two years already, and unemployment is stalled at a too-high 5.7 per cent.

The bad news kept coming last week. For instance, the Reserve Bank, frightened of a weakening economy, cut the official interest rate to a record low. Treasurer Scott Morrison also admitted the government's tax take could be hit by unusually low inflation, meaning our massive debt could spiral even higher. But just when it had become even more urgent to slash government spending, the final counting of votes gave us a Senate even more unworkable than the last.

[BLOG WITH ANDREW BOLT](#)

With Turnbull now needing either the Greens' votes on the Left or Pauline Hanson's four Senators on the Right to get anything past Labor, this new Senate will demand not less spending, but more. But what's the government actually done to save us from any of this? Sure, there's been plenty of talk about being "agile".

There's also been lots of ideas that Turnbull has talked about one day and junked the next, like raising the GST or letting the states raise their own income taxes. Then there has been his 10-year promise to cut company tax even for big business — a plan this populist Senate seems certain to block.

But what has Turnbull actually done? In 11 months? This complete lack of an agenda is why the Prime Minister — looking increasingly haggard — seems like a cork helplessly swept along by a river. Without an agenda of his own, he is forced to talk endlessly about the agenda of his enemies, of the ABC, or whatever the wind blew into his face.

During the election campaign, for instance, Turnbull couldn't stop talking about Medicare — Labor's special subject and an election loser for the Liberals. Malcolm Turnbull spent time last week trading insults with Kevin Rudd.

It was the same stupid story two weeks ago. On the Monday, Turnbull happened to be watching the ABC when he saw a highly emotive and heavily slanted story claiming that children in detention in the Northern Territory were being tortured like the prisoners of Abu Ghraib. Without bothering to ask experts if these wild claims were true (they weren't), Turnbull rushed to call a royal commission before breakfast the next morning, hoping to show the ABC he really could be "decisive". Alas, in his rush, Turnbull and Attorney-General George Brandis appointed two royal commissioners so hopelessly conflicted or biased that one resigned and the other should.

It was once again the same story on Thursday, after the big banks decided they simply could not afford to pass on all the Reserve Bank's cut in the official interest rate. With Labor calling for a royal commission into banks, Turnbull panicked and quickly did some bank-bashing of his own. By golly, Turnbull shouted, he would now force bank bosses to front parliament once a year to get a jolly good talking to. This was craven, useless and totally unconvincing.

On this talk-talk-talk sideshow went, with Turnbull also yabbering about his doomed plan to change the Constitution to divide us by race.

So much useless talk about marginal stuff of interest only to the ABC crowd.

But there was absolutely no action from Turnbull to lower taxes, cut spending, improve trade, reform workplaces, slash red tape, cut the size of government or free business from the green regulations that frighten off investors.

Rudd describes Turnbull as a brick wall

In fact, Turnbull spent more time last week trading insults with former prime minister Kevin Rudd than talking trade or anything else that might put Australians in work. Just why Turnbull is so absolutely clueless — so frozen in inaction — is a question for a psychologist.

Is it because he only ever had one plan — to become prime minister — and hasn't got a single idea what to do with the job now that he's got it? Is it because he's so desperate to be loved that he simply can't bear to make the tough calls demanded now that the money has run out?

And is it also because Turnbull really is a Labor cuckoo in a Liberal nest, and hates to do the only things his party will let him do? Or — shock — is Malcolm Turnbull simply not that smart?

Whatever the reason, the result is that in 11 months as Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull has done absolutely nothing of real value. Liberal MPs must now know what a terrible mistake they've made with this man, only they will be too embarrassed to yet admit it — even after being led to a humiliating near defeat.

But how long can they afford to cling to Turnbull? How long can Australia?

