

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Coalition can't take a trick

Simon Benson, The Australian, 12:00AM July 2, 2018

It may be an historical curiosity that no opposition leader has taken their party to victory with such a large deficit in approval ratings as Bill Shorten has now. But there is a simple mathematical fact from which there is no escape for the Coalition. If you're not in front you don't win.

Shorten is problematically unpopular for Labor. Turnbull is growing in stature.

But on current numbers, the Coalition is still a long way from being able to win an election. At 49-51 and with the nominal loss of its already slim majority, the Coalition loses uncomfortably.

And nothing seems to be shifting the dial of popular opinion. A point won one week is a point taken away in the weeks that follow. At best it is incrementalism.

Political water torture.

There was every hope that the Coalition would get to a game-changing 50-50 this week. Having legislated \$144 billion in personal income tax cuts, the government rolled into the last sitting week of parliament before the winter break skating on an historical political victory and policy achievement.

Shorten then obliged Turnbull by blowing himself up with a captain's call on repealing company tax cuts — an issue measurably less popular than personal income tax cuts. The result? A single point change in Newspoll. Company tax cuts are more popular than the government.

One has to wonder what the government can possibly do to lift its fortunes if events of the past two weeks can't.

Some will argue that this was a positive result for the government, in as much as it didn't go backwards. Shorten, on the other hand, will be counting his lucky stars that it wasn't worse for him, as it rightly should have been.