

Andrew Bolt: Can Scott Morrison end the Liberals' civil war?

Andrew Bolt, Herald Sun
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SCOTT Morrison today became Australia's seventh prime minister in 11 years, without asking voters or even giving a single interview to tell us why he should get the job. That alone will deepen public disgust with Australian politics, but for Morrison the first challenge is this — will his win end the civil war that's tearing apart his Liberal party?

Morrison's task is huge.

This Pentecostal Christian who stopped the boats as Immigration Minister is nevertheless not trusted by many conservatives, especially after ratting out on Tony Abbott in the Malcolm Turnbull coup in 2015.

SCOTT MORRISON IS AUSTRALIA'S NEW PRIME MINISTER



Scott Morrison is Australia's new Prime Minister. Picture: David Gray

Abbott despises him. Peter Dutton, defeated in today's ballot, will resent him.

But Morrison did get the votes of the Liberal Left after Turnbull used his last 24 hours as Prime Minister to desperately still holding the leadership challenge to buy his Treasurer time to win more votes.

If Morrison can now heal old animosities with the conservative wing, he may yet get some pretence of unity in the party that today seems utterly shattered by hatred and ideologies.

Dutton immediately pledged Morrison his "absolutely loyalty", but Abbott in declaring there was now a "government to save" did not congratulate Morrison on his win.

But much depends on what policies Morrison now comes up with, especially on electricity prices and global warming — the issue that destroyed Turnbull's leadership when 13 Coalition MPs threatened to vote against his National Energy Guarantee in Parliament.

Here, the omens aren't good, especially with Energy and Environment Minister Josh Frydenberg, architect of the NEG, overwhelmingly elected Morrison's deputy.



Josh Frydenberg and Scott Morrison after winning the vote in the Liberal Leadership spill at Parliament House in Canberra. Picture: Kym Smith

Frydenberg is very able, with at least grudging respect on both sides of the party.

But unless Morrison and Frydenberg now junk or drastically revise the NEG they've spent months selling, a critical rift remains between the Liberal Leftists who preach global warming and the conservatives who warn that the NEG is all pain for no gain.

And what of that other hot-button issue that Turnbull dodged and Dutton and Abbott raised: immigration?

Morrison trashed the idea of cutting back on the huge numbers of immigrants coming in when Abbott demanded it, and kiboshed a modest cut when Dutton last year suggested it.

But now what, with polls showing wide opposition to the level of immigration today?

Most commentators will judge this contest as a popularity contest. But the rest test will be policy.

Morrison may sell things better, but that means nothing if the public doesn't want what's in his shop. That will be the key: will Morrison just sell the same Turnbull stuff, but better? Or will he offer something different? Will he be more spin or more substance?

We must wait and see, and only then can conservatives judge. By Morrison's deeds will they judge him.