

Accidental PM Scott Morrison must speak up

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SCOTT Morrison is already running out of time. He still can't explain why he is our new Prime Minister. That means when parliament returns on Monday, Labor will savage him as an accidental leader with nothing to say for himself.

Morrison, who badly needs to make a good first impression with an election due by May, is making it easy for Labor by simply aiming to be Prime Minister Not-As-Bad.

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For instance, he's not as bad as Malcolm Turnbull, dumped two weeks ago for being unable to sell even ice creams in a desert.

And so Morrison busily shows he's more plain speaking and in touch with battlers — keener on cutting electricity prices than emissions. He'll also ditch Turnbull's plan to raise the retirement age to 70. Morrison also wants to seem not as bad as Labor leader Bill Shorten, who'd spend even more than Morrison's Liberals, who themselves have doubled our net debt.

He's certainly desperate to seem not as bad as Tony Abbott, at least in the eyes of his party's angry Left.

That's why Morrison refuses so far to do what Abbott suggested — slash immigration, build a coal-fired power station and tear up the pointless Paris Agreement to cut emissions.

See, he's Prime Minister Not-As-Bad. Trouble is, that doesn't make him Prime Minister Good or Prime Minister Stand-For-Something.

Alas, Morrison is a politician who decides his position by consulting not his convictions but a measuring tape, to work out the halfway point between two extremes.

Scott Morrison is already running out of time. He still can't explain why he is our new Prime Minister. Picture: AAP/Dan Peled

It's timid. And it's not working.

Yes, Morrison does present much better than Turnbull. He seems more interested in fixing your problems than in fluffing his feathers. He speaks more convincingly and, if given a chance, could still do well.

But he's not getting that chance.

By doing nothing bold he's created a news vacuum. Result: he's being pecked to death on trivia, rather than attacked for thinking big. The craziest example: the media has badgered him for five days over a ludicrous non-story that female Liberal MPs were bullied when Turnbull was sacked. I say ludicrous, because we still haven't got a single example of this alleged bullying.

Morrison is also distracted by the au pair "scandal" — claims that Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton overruled his department to let in tourists suspected of working as au pairs.

Never mind that Labor's Tony Burke, meanwhile, urged him to let in a Muslim hate preacher. Morrison has also been drowned by leaks from people extremely close to Malcolm Turnbull, selling a fantasy that Turnbull was actually a political genius dumped just as he was about to save his government.

So we read that Saviour Turnbull was all set to spend \$7.6 billion on infrastructure to save marginal seats and \$4.4 billion more to placate Catholic schools, while his secret polls showed him about to finally outpoll Labor like he'd actually never done in 23 months.

The latest leak is that Turnbull offered to make Dutton the deputy leader — taking Julie Bishop's job — in a last-minute panic to hang on as PM.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has been busily showing he's more plain speaking and in touch with battlers. Picture: David Swift

Meanwhile, Morrison has ministers on the Liberals' Left, such as Christopher Pyne and Simon Birmingham, publicly tugging his leash by declaring we must

cut our emissions under the Paris Agreement, while Turnbull's son Alex now openly campaigns for Labor instead.

True, Morrison can't act as boldly as would an Abbott or a Dutton, or not without risking turning this sulky mutiny from the Turnbullites into open revolt. But he's kidding himself when he sells his weakness as a virtue to favoured journalists, boasting that he's more interested in outcomes than ideology.

He says he won't scrap the Paris Agreement because "I won't be doing Bill Shorten any favours" and won't cut immigration because he reportedly "dislikes the public debate".

But a politician without an ideology looks like a politician without a plan. A politician who won't risk an argument — on global warming, for instance — will just lose it. And that's Morrison's problem: he's hiding from fights that would indeed cause outrage but would therefore make news.

That means the only fights he gets into are picked by his enemies.

Look at the pickle he's in: would he really rather be arguing about whether Liberals bully women, when he could be arguing to slash immigration? Either way he'd get monstered by the media, but it's surely better to be attacked for your strengths than for your weaknesses.

At least the public would learn what you stand for, and see you strong in the struggle.

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