

What the PM's offensive tweet says about this government

SMH/Age Jacqueline Maley, 16 September 2018 — 12:14am

Nothing tells you more about the removal of the political class from ordinary people than the attempts of the political class to engage with ordinary people.

On Thursday night Prime Minister Scott Morrison tweeted out a wannabe witty video in which government MPs were seen to raise their hands to the beat of a hip-hop song by an artist named Fatman Scoop, the lyrics of which run: “You got a hundred dollar bill, get your hands up!/You got a fifty dollar bill, get your hands up!”

Immediately, the video - and Morrison - were mocked with an incredulity and viciousness not seen since Craig Emerson sang his memorable "No Whyalla Wipeout" version of the Skyhooks' song Horror Movie back in 2012.

The rest of the lyrics of the Fatman Scoop song include the lines “who’s f--king tonight” and “to all my n--gas that they hit it from the back” - an apparent reference to a boutique sex act.

Compared with that, Emmo’s rock-out to a boombox in a parliamentary courtyard during the nadir of the carbon tax debate seems a hark back to a more innocent time.

A time when, sure, our first female prime minister was labelled a witch and jokes were made about her drowning, but at least we managed to keep references to anal sex out of the political debate.

Morrison quickly withdrew the offending material from social media, tweeting: “The full lyrics of the song used in my earlier video from QT today were just not OK. When I found out, I asked the team to take it down. Apologies.”

Props to the PM for apologising, but the damage was surely done, just as surely as it was when, as head of Tourism Australia, Morrison oversaw a marketing campaign featuring Lara Bingle, and a borderline swearword, which was banned in the UK.

Back then, at least Morrison knew what he was selling.

What is he selling now? His government is a shopfront without a product - and by his own admission, Miss Piggy and Fozzie Bear are manning the till.

If the Coalition was running a 7-Eleven you would cross the road to avoid it. You wouldn't trust it to serve you a pre-made slushie.

But there was something lost in the furore over the video. Before the Prime Minister realised his mistake, what had he hoped to achieve with it? What message was it supposed to convey? What kind of political narrative is, "You got a hundred dollar bill put your hand up!"?

Is it a hip message about the Coalition's economic credentials? Or just a boast about how much parliamentarians are paid?

Morrison's inheritance - which he has dubbed The Muppet Show - means his biggest problem will be to cut through to jaded voters who have sought refuge in rejectionism, the kind of voterly foetal position that is threatening democracies around the world.

With so little time before the next election, Morrison seems to have abandoned the idea, for now, of marking out any great positive policy differences between his government and his predecessor's.

During his first major speech as Prime Minister, in the historical Menzies heartland of Albury, NSW, Morrison was quite open about this. "I haven't come to you today with a to-do list of stuff," he said, an extraordinary admission for any prime minister, but particularly for Morrison, whose mantra as treasurer was that he was "getting on with the job".

What we got instead was an exhortation to love one another and come together. Morrison's newly reshuffled frontbenchers, who have not loved each other very well in recent times, looked on with frozen smiles.

On climate change, the National Energy Guarantee has been dumped, and we are told Australia will meet its Paris Agreement emissions reductions commitments without it. No one can answer, then, why we needed it in the first place, least of all the new Environment Minister, Melissa Price. "Give me a break ... I've just got my feet under the desk," Price said to Radio National's Patricia Karvelas on Thursday night.

Senator Jim Molan, speaking on Sky News, repeated the “give us a break” line, as though the electorate is a needy toddler who needs to stop pestering its parents to meet its most basic needs. We are promised a political fix on the schools funding issue, which will almost certainly comprise a capitulation to the Catholic and independent schools lobbies, and a further watering down of the original Gonski reforms.

There is no word on health funding, housing affordability, early childhood funding, industrial relations reform or tax reform. The economy is motoring along, and jobs figures out this week were strong. But who can hear the good news underneath the cacophony of bad?

Most of the week was taken up with a nasty argument about whether or not the Liberal Party is hostile to women, with now-open talk of the Liberals’ “woman problem”. That was only relieved by Peter Dutton using parliamentary privilege to accuse his mortal enemy, former Border Force chief Roman Quaedvlieg, of “grooming”. Dutton showed up to question time with folders visibly marked with the names of Labor’s Chris Bowen and Tony Burke, who preceded him in the immigration portfolio.

It was an apparent threat, and a very bad show.

Morrison is the frontman for it, and, absent any real policy to sell, his job, it seems, is to soften the image, or project the narrative, of a government with a hollow agenda and a complex web of competing hatreds. He is doing this through a combination of suburban “daggy dad” plays and Tony Abbott-style three-word slogans.

Meanwhile, the Parliament has very little actual business in front of it, and each sitting week represents little more than opportunity for further disaster.

The last words should probably go to Fatman Scoop, whose lyrics have become the libretto of these strange political times: “All the chicken-heads, be quiet”