

Morrison now paying the price for Turnbull's demise

Simon Benson, COMMENT, 11:00PM October 28, 2018

Scott Morrison's electoral honeymoon appears to be over.

Not only has the Coalition slipped back after signs of momentum, public opinion of Morrison's leadership has turned sharply for the worse. And the Liberal Party vote is beginning to tank again.

You get the impression the gaggle of wreckers who tore down Malcolm Turnbull might now realise the damage they've done.

Two issues are at play.

Morrison is now paying the full price for the removal of Malcolm Turnbull. As much as he insists that he didn't seek the leadership and was not a supporter of the spill, voters see him as the beneficiary. Morrison has faced something that Turnbull, Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard never had to contend with as a second-round transaction cost for rolling a leader and seizing the leadership — a by-election for the seat of the dethroned prime minister.

While Morrison was starting to make ground after the spill, the Wentworth by-election just reminded everyone of everything bad and he had no shortage of people happy to remind punters.

The other problem Morrison faces is also a legacy issue from Turnbull.

Bill Shorten's ability to knock the government off message and force ideological debate over issues that divide the Coalition was a fundamental problem for the government under the former PM.

It would seem to be continuing under Morrison. The Coalition appears to be dancing to Shorten's tune in the absence of having one of its own. This was startlingly obvious in the week leading up to the Wentworth by-election when Morrison was forced into unwanted debate about the rights of gay students in Christian schools and asylum-seekers on Nauru. For the first time since becoming leader, he did not control the debate.

It will be sobering for Morrison that he has recorded his first negative net satisfaction rating, which means more people don't approve of his performance than those who do.

While this isn't extraordinary for a prime minister, with voters quick to become disillusioned, Morrison's dive into negative territory has been relatively rapid and is on par with Tony Abbott and Rudd the second time around.

For all three prime ministers, according to historical analysis of Newspolls, it has been the fourth poll following their election as leader when it all began to go wrong.

By way of comparison, it took Turnbull six months to hit negative territory on taking the leadership from Abbott in September 2015. Rudd managed to stay popular for two years and four months before sliding into the bad books. The second time around it took him only six weeks (four polls). John Howard managed a respectable innings, surviving one year and two months in positive territory following his election in March 1996. Gillard holds the record for longevity following a spill by holding on to a positive approval rating for eight months after rolling Rudd and taking the leadership in July 2010.

Abbott managed to only stay level with Rudd #2, being popular for six weeks (4 polls).

Paul Keating never enjoyed a positive net satisfaction score.

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