

There's a nice story about Arthur Fadden - the Country Party leader who became PM in the 1941 hung parliament amid conservative leadership turmoil - deciding not to move into the Lodge after a colleague told him he'd "scarcely have enough time to wear a track from the backdoor to the shithouse before you'll be out".

The warning was prophetic: Fadden was dispatched in little over a month, replaced in a House of Representatives vote by Labor's John Curtin.

Scott Morrison, ensconced in Kirribilli, has already had a longer spell than Fadden, and his government appears safe in parliament, despite losing its majority. Regardless of these differences, Morrison's likely trajectory seems as clear as that of "Artie" all those years ago.

The widespread feeling that the Morrison government is doomed will only be reinforced by this week's outbreak of hostilities between the former and current prime ministers.

At one level, it's hard to believe we're seeing a rerun of this old script; at another, it confirms that disunity has become baked into a Liberal party probably unable to get beyond its dysfunction without a cleansing period in opposition.

For three years, Turnbull had to endure the sniping of Tony Abbott, the man he brought down. Now Turnbull is the sniper at the window, though Morrison didn't cause his fall (unless you buy the conspiracy theory).

We can assume Turnbull's mood is dark. That is understandable. It is also dangerous for the government, especially as many voters neither understood nor welcomed the leadership change.

This week's fallout from Turnbull's Indonesian excursion has undermined Morrison on foreign policy – about which he gave his first major address on Thursday – and cast doubt on his personal credibility.

Grattan on Friday: Now Malcolm Turnbull is the sniper at the window

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

As is now well known, Turnbull's trip representing Australia at a conference about oceans included talks with President Joko Widodo, who was smarting from Morrison's announcement that Australia would consider moving its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. After the talks, Turnbull met the media and issued a strong warning against such a move.

On Thursday, an obviously frustrated Morrison told 2GB's Alan Jones the former prime minister wouldn't be sent on any more missions. "He was there to actually attend an oceans conference, the issues of trade and other things of course were not really part of the brief," Morrison said, in what turned out to be an unfortunate gloss.

Turnbull immediately took to Twitter, to set out "a few facts".

He said Morrison had "asked me to discuss trade and the embassy issue in Bali and we had a call before I left to confirm his messages which I duly relayed" to the President. "There was a detailed paper on the issue in my official brief as well", Turnbull added.

That left Morrison with some explaining to do. In a statement he said he'd invited Turnbull to represent him at the oceans conference and to be "head of delegation".

"He was briefed on appropriate responses on other issues that could be raised in any direct discussions with the President, in his role of head of delegation. Accordingly there were briefings dealing with the issues he [Turnbull] has referred to," Morrison said, reiterating that "the purpose of his attendance was the Oceans conference".

The different emphasis in the two accounts stands out. Turnbull suggests he was asked to actively convey messages; Morrison's version is that Turnbull was given "responses" to provide.

Obviously it was risky for Morrison to send Turnbull in the first place; equally, it was provocative of Turnbull to speak publicly about the content of his talks and, especially, to air his disagreement with government policy.

Read more: [*View from The Hill: When you're not PM but behave like you are*](#)

The week has been another demonstration of those “transaction” costs of an ill-advised switch of leaders - costs also reflected in Monday’s Newspoll, showing the Coalition going backwards to trail Labor 46-54%.

After some initial favourable publicity Morrison is now widely referred to, often disparagingly, as coming from a “marketing” background. His political fixes are viewed, cynically but accurately, through that prism.

Read more: [*Poll wrap: Morrison's ratings slump in Newspoll; Wentworth's huge difference in on-the-day and early voting*](#)

Take for example the government’s plan to remove the remaining about 40 children from Nauru by Christmas.

It is responding to increasing public concern. But one can’t help thinking it probably calculates that if just the children (and their families) are taken off, the immediate public pressure will go away too. No need for it to feel much urgency about all those male refugees on Manus, because they don’t have the same political salience.

What it says about even the children is, however, grudging and misleading. Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton insists they’ll not stay in Australia, but eventually end up elsewhere, whether the US, another third country or their home country.

In practice, from all we know from the past, many or most will remain here. But the government

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won't admit that, supposedly because to do so might encourage the people smugglers. Does it really think they are so easily fooled? What actually deters them is the Australian flotilla ready to turn back their boats.

Dutton on Thursday also effectively ruled out sending people to New Zealand, even if Labor passed the legislation to close the "back door" to Australia.

"My judgment at the moment, based on all of the advice available to me is that New Zealand would be a pull factor at this point in time," he told Sky.

The strategy seems clear. Fix the issue of the children, then paint Labor's commitment to send people to New Zealand as one that would encourage the boats to restart.

Presumably Turnbull will be asked about refugees when he does the ABC's Q&A next Thursday. With a full program to himself, he'll be quizzed about a lot of matters, including energy and climate change policy, as well as the embassy debate – which did not rate a mention in Morrison's Thursday speech.

There's inevitable speculation about whether Turnbull will wear his leather jacket. The real question is what persona the man in the jacket, whether it's leather or cloth, will choose to adopt. Morrison, for one, will be sweating on the answer.

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

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