



## Scott Morrison's Politics Must Have Some Policy

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“Dare to be different” is an advertising slogan employed in some form or another by companies like Honda to sell cars and Apple to sell computers, and by practically anyone who’s ever printed a T-shirt.

If the Liberal Party is to have any chance of winning the next federal election Prime Minister Scott Morrison must not only say he’s different from Malcolm Turnbull – from the Labor Party – he must also prove it.

The first part of that task is talking about politics. The second part is committing to policies.

On Thursday in Albury, the spiritual home of the Liberal Party, in a speech to the Menzies Research Centre, the [Prime Minister delivered an unscripted speech about his personal and political philosophy](#).

Perhaps inevitably the speech was the proverbial curate’s egg. Some parts were outstanding,



such as when he made the obvious but important point that “the best form of welfare is a job”.

Other parts were trite, such as when he remarked that “as Australians, we look after our mates”.

And yet other parts were trivial, such as when he foreshadowed the federal government would ban plastic food wrappings.

Other than when he talked specifically about Robert Menzies and the Liberals there wasn't a lot Morrison said that a Labor MP would disagree with. Any Labor MP, if they'd been in the audience, would have applauded enthusiastically when Morrison said that the government would remain in the [Paris agreement on climate change](#).

And as good as the PM's remarks are about work and welfare, until they're turned into policy they remain just words.

The point is that, although [admittedly he's only been in the job two weeks](#), the Prime Minister has yet to establish what the main policy differences are between him and Bill Shorten.

Yesterday the PM talked of the need to create “a noble society” and “a caring society”. Whether such a society is very different from a society built on the idea of “the common good” (which is the title of Bill Shorten's book) is unclear.

## Significant difference

Morrison will point to differences such as the Liberals' policy of reducing the corporate tax rate for smaller companies to 25 per cent, while Labor's policy is a tax rate for such companies of 27.5 per cent. That is merely a distinction without much difference.

To take energy policy, for example, if Morrison announced that Australia was withdrawing from the Paris agreement in an effort to bring down household electricity prices then for the first time since the Coalition was elected in 2013 would there be a significant and easily understood policy difference on climate change between the Liberals and Labor.

If Morrison said that he supported at least an investigation into establishing a nuclear power industry in this country that would be another difference.

Under Malcolm Turnbull's leadership the Liberal Party deliberately narrowed the policy differences between it and Labor. Liberal MPs acquiesced to the strategy partly because they thought that saying what they actually believed in would prove electorally unpopular and also because many Liberal MPs were in broad agreement with what Labor wanted to do.

If the [Liberals' leadership vote between Morrison and Peter Dutton](#) is taken as a proxy for the Liberal party room's views on climate change, about half of Liberal MPs have views more closely aligned with those of Labor MPs than with the other half of the Liberal party room.



Turnbull's approach to politics didn't only result in claims of the Liberals as "Labor-lite", it produced a mere one-seat victory at the 2016 federal election.

While it might be true that in an electoral system with compulsory voting such as we have in Australia, elections are determined by so-called "swinging" voters in the so-called "centre", it doesn't necessarily follow that the two major parties must offer identical policies to gain the support of such voters.

Nor does it follow that if a policy is popular with a political party's "base" it will therefore be unpopular with swinging voters. John Howard's policies were supported by many more people than just rusted-on Liberals.

The Prime Minister has to be careful not to spend so much time doing politics that he forgets it's policies that ultimately make a difference to people's lives, not platitudes.

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