

Australia: When Scott Morrison Met Nemesis

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*There are few surprises regarding the final episode of Nemesis, the [three-part account](#) on how the Australian Liberal Party, in partnership with the dozy Nationals, psychotically and convulsively disembowelled themselves from the time Tony Abbott won office in 2013. Over the muddy gore and violence concluding the tenures of Abbott and Malcolm Turnbull, one plotter rose, knife bloodied and brimming with confidence: **Scott Morrison**. As always, he claims to have done so without a trace. That, dear readers, is the way of all advertising men.*

The inconspicuous rise of Morrison heralded a bankrupt political culture, one of smeary gloss, smug grabs on complex issues, the insufferable slogan, the intelligence shaving brochure, the simplifying statement about worlds complex and abstract. No political environment can, nor should ever eschew the simple message, but Morrisons's minute, unimaginative cosmos - that of the advertising man with his swill bucket sloshing away - had little to merit it.

With such a stunted Weltanschauung, Morrison's misdeeds proved vast in spread and stench, the result of what former cabinet minister and creep-in-chief Christopher Pyne understatedly called a "lack of humility". The makers of *Nemesis* could only dip their feet in the waters of his blighted stewardship. It would have taken several immersions alone to cover the despoiling of public life marked by stacking the Fair Work Commission and Administrative Appeals Tribunal with appointments friendly to the Coalition or the so-called "rorts" affairs, of which there were many cloacal instances of corruption.

While the library of Australian politics is shelf-heavy with misused funds to advance the fortunes of the party in government, the Morrison government proved exemplary. In the lead-up to the 2019 election, Nationals Senator Bridget McKenzie's office was the happy

recipient of \$100 million worth of community sport infrastructure grants. Their destination was exclusively towards marginal seats, best [typified by the mock presentation](#) by Georgina Downer to the South Australian Yankalilla bowling club of a \$127,373 grant. The novelty cheque from the Liberal candidate for Mayo was scorned by sitting member and independent Rebekha Sharkie at the time as unrivalled in its crassness and desperation.

Much the same story was repeated in the so-called “car parks rorts” affair, which saw hundreds of millions of dollars directed towards 47 car parks, largely [located in the top 20 marginal seats](#) selected by staffers working for the then infrastructure minister, Alan Tudge. The decision making by the staffers left the Department of Infrastructure a mere spectator to policy.

By 2022, Morrison’s crooked form on the issue of grants was complete and immortal. The Australian National Audit Office, when examining the Building Better Regions Fund (BBRF), [found](#) that “65 per cent of IP [infrastructure project] stream applications approved for funding were not those assessed as being the most meritorious in the assessment process.”

Other matters covered in the series finale continue to look baffling and uncomfortable. Authoritarian paranoia made its ugly appearance in Morrison’s decision to appoint himself, unbeknownst to his fellow ministers, to the departments of health, finance, treasury, home affairs and resources during the COVID-19 crisis. Despite the ravages of the pandemic and the risks of debility to his cabinet, there was no reason for doing so.

Excruciating clumsiness stood out with his handling of sexual assault allegations made by Liberal staffer Brittany Higgins (“Jenny [Morrison’s wife] and I spoke last night and she said to me, you have to think about this as a father”) while his abominable treatment of Christine Holgate, which resulted in the removal of Australia Post’s most successful CEO for approving Cartier watches for select staff, suggested what came to known as the government’s “woman problem”. The Nationals leader, David Littleproud, could only draw the obvious conclusion: “[W]omen had lost faith in us because we didn’t handle those situations well. That was the real beginning, where Australians stopped listening, but particularly women stopped listening.”

Gross indifference over his clandestine family trip to Hawaii as Australia scorched and smouldered before furious bush fires, one which he hoped the then-Nationals leader Michael McCormack could keep mum about, suggested Morrison’s lack of maturity. “It looked as if there had been lies told to the [press] gallery,” Liberal Senator Andrew Bragg admitted. Liberal MP Russell Broadbent preferred to be “gobsmacked” about the whole affair.

On the issue of the AUKUS security pact between the US, UK and Australia, Morrison nails his colours firmly to the mast as a dangerously deluded pioneer. It was he, and only he, that suggested the submarine agreement with France’s Naval Group for twelve diesel-powered attack submarines be scratched in favour of a nuclear-propulsion option.

Given the incurably mendacious nature of the man, claims to having a monopoly on AUKUS must be regarded with caution. For one thing, it has [since come to light](#) that the Australian businessman Anthony Pratt already had former US President Donald Trump’s ear on the subject of nuclear-powered submarines when they met at the Mar-a-Lago club in April 2021. Pratt then allegedly shared the details of the discussion with three former Australian prime ministers, 10 Australian officials, 11 of Pratt’s employees and six journalists. The announcement of AUKUS only took place on September 15, 2021, suggesting a filtering of

ideas through the Australian-US security apparatus. Trump may have left office by then, but the lingering interests of the US military industrial complex had not.

Morrison's unspeakable treatment of the French president, Emmanuel Macron, proved diabolically amateurish and spiteful. To have dinner with the head of state of another country even as plans to terminate an agreement worth A\$90 billion is underfoot, suggests some form of arrested mental development. "You don't cancel a \$90 billion contract and the other party is happy," he merely shrugged. In any case, he did not want to see Macron deploy "the entire French diplomatic corps and [kill] the deal". This was, in his mind, "the best" of decisions, "one that others had never sought to successfully undertake."

If the best decision of an administration involves the renting of a country's autonomy, the surrendering of land and facilities to be used by a nuclear-armed, clumsy goliath, the conversion of an entire state to the status of a garrisoned, forward defence base to police rivals, including a power with whom you have no historical animosity with, one is coming very close to confusing patriotic innovation and self-interest with treason.

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