

6

THE PERSONALISATION OF THE CAMPAIGN

Paul Strangio and James Walter

This chapter considers the characteristics of the leaders of the major parties, Scott Morrison and Bill Shorten, the circumstances with which they were confronted and the way opportunities were seized or lost to confound the widespread expectations that had preceded the 2019 election campaign.

The media's inordinately 'leader-centric' bias in campaign reporting is long-established. Yet it might have been thought that the bitter experience of leadership turmoil in both parties of government over the previous decade would have put a brake on public expectations that the 'right' leader would provide the solution to present dilemmas. Indeed, some commentators remarked that 'Australia has had enough of messianic leaders for a while' (Hartcher 2019a). The Labor Party's campaign—choreographed as a team effort—seemed apt if such a transition in leadership style proved better attuned to the zeitgeist. For their part, Liberal Party MPs were reportedly unhappy with the 'presidential' aspect of Malcolm Turnbull's campaign at the 2016 election and reluctant to see a reversion to the leader 'standing in' for the party (Crowe 2019). And yet, this was precisely what defined the campaign, as Morrison, 'the Messiah from the Shire', contrived what had seemed an improbable victory. Leader-centrism appears once more to have been endorsed.

Observers argued that Morrison had 'to carry the operation because there's no alternative' (Murphy 2019b). On the other hand, it rapidly became apparent that playing the lone fighter, battling the odds against what

appeared to be an ascendant Labor Party, suited Morrison's combative temperament and played to his strong suit. He proved a formidable campaigner—energised on the hustings, a big personality and 'a natural one-man-band, filling the stage, pounding the drums' (Grattan 2019b). Morrison the extrovert's love of such showmanship, combined with a capacity to play the everyman, chatting amiably with all-comers on the campaign trail, contrasted with Shorten's more wooden persona. It was not that Shorten lacked people skills, but he was most adept in small groups and face-to-face encounters in which his ability to persuade and negotiate had been honed during his work as a senior trade union official. He only rarely managed to translate those skills on to bigger stages.

Shorten was further constrained from matching the leadership grandiosity of the Morrison campaign by his perennially poor popularity ratings. Possessing neither an easy appeal nor magnetism, he had also been dogged by a perception of shiftiness originating from his part in bringing down two former Labor prime ministers, Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard. The settled, unflattering view of Shorten as a factional machine man accentuated the contrast with the cleanskin and everyman Morrison. Yet Shorten's team-orientated approach was also a product of his background and instinct. As Labor leader, he had applied his union experience in orchestrating groups and negotiating deals to cauterise the party's wounds from the infighting of 2010–13. Together with a unified Shadow Cabinet, Shorten had developed an extensive policy agenda (see also Manwaring, Chapter 13, and Scott, Chapter 20, this volume). Now he would present as a team director—or 'coach', as he liked to characterise his leadership role—consistently flanked by senior colleagues who shared the articulation of Labor's ambitious program.

The scene was set, then, for an unusually clear differentiation between what the Coalition and Labor offered the public and how the leaders presented. Nothing illuminated the distinctions more starkly than the campaign launches of the major parties. Shorten joined his entire Shadow Cabinet on stage, foreshadowing a raft of policies packaged as delivering fairness and equality, with past Labor prime ministers in the front row, including the recent mortal enemies, Rudd and Gillard, to prove that old divisions had been transcended. In contrast, despite introductory speeches by a handful of others, the dominant image of the Liberal Party launch was of Morrison alone on the stage, with only his family for support at the end, speaking of the 'promise of being Australian' and allowing Australians 'quietly going about their lives, to realise their simple, honest and decent aspirations—quiet, hardworking Australians'. It was, in effect, a launch

of Scott Morrison, aiming to consolidate the personalisation to which the entire campaign had been directed. The result would amount to a test case of the appeal of leader pre-eminence versus collaborative leadership in the electorate—or at least the capacity of Morrison and Shorten to ‘sell’ the relative advantages of each.

The creation of ‘ScoMo’

In the course of a 12-year career in federal politics, Scott Morrison perfected the technique of presenting a public persona—hardworking, capable, approachable, positive and straightforward—that plays to advantage on the political stage, but masks the driven, ambitious political operator, adopting whatever tactic suits his ends in pursuing his objectives. Despite an early career in marketing, which peaked with his appointment (by the Howard Government) as inaugural director of Tourism Australia (2004–06), he entered politics as a political apparatchik, having served as director of the NSW Liberal Party (2000–04) before winning a controversial pre-selection battle for the NSW seat of Cook in 2006. Morrison was elected to the Commonwealth Parliament in 2007.

That pre-selection process was an early manifestation of Morrison’s predilection for hardball politics. Competing against Michael Towke, Morrison lost the first round of voting 82 votes to eight. Immediately, a series of damaging stories in Sydney’s *Daily Telegraph*, and an equally damaging file presented to the NSW party executive, put paid to Towke’s ambitions; Morrison was endorsed. Labor Party MP and fixer Senator Sam Dastyari had compiled the file but said he handed over the material to Morrison’s ‘factional lieutenants’, remarking later: ‘I would never underestimate Scott Morrison because I would never underestimate a guy who would turn to one of his political opponents to take out one of his own ... a guy who will do that will do anything’ (see Martin 2019).

A modus operandi had been established: Morrison was adept at attracting supporters who, as in this case, would play crucial roles in later episodes that furthered his career, but allowed plausible deniability about his own agency in what transpired. Thus, when Malcolm Turnbull challenged Tony Abbott in 2015, Morrison demonstrated his support for the leader—even showing his vote for Abbott to colleagues—but let his parliamentary supporters vote for Turnbull (Kelly 2018: 25). ‘If he had wanted his supporters to back Tony’, said a senior Liberal, ‘it would have happened’ (Snow 2019a: 33). Likewise, in the remarkable events of late August 2018 that saw Turnbull deposed,

Morrison was represented as ‘the accidental prime minister’, only standing for the position when Turnbull realised his leadership was beyond salvation and released him to do so. Yet the double dealing of Morrison’s supporters in the initial ballot precipitated by Peter Dutton that undermined Turnbull, and in contriving to edge out Julie Bishop while ensuring the defeat of Dutton in the second ballot, later became known (Savva 2019b; Sky News 2019; Williams 2019).

As a senior minister in both the Abbott and the Turnbull Coalition Cabinets, Morrison had shown himself to be tough, pragmatic and adaptable. As Minister for Immigration and Border Protection (2013–14), he took pride in having devised, with former major-general and later Senator Jim Molan (see Chapter 2, this volume), Operation Sovereign Borders to stop asylum seeker boats. Insiders thought he pursued policy aggressively, sometimes as a hard man, with a predilection for secrecy, and used his authority to lean on others. As Minister for Social Services (2014–15), he adopted a more ‘caring’ demeanour as a negotiator with the welfare lobby. Then as Treasurer (2015–18), he changed gear again to seem the enlightened technocrat. His technique for dealing with controversy was to invent a rationale that prevented him answering questions, or, if they could not be avoided, to imply he had no personal responsibility for events: ‘I did the job that I had to do in that situation’ (see Kelly 2018: 25). While competent and reliable with a prodigious appetite for work and impatience with anyone who got in his way, Morrison was not, according to a leading business figure, ‘a particularly deep thinker ... he is very transactional’ (quoted in Snow 2019a: 33).

Sean Kelly argues that Morrison developed a capacity to do whatever was needed to scramble through the ranks while revealing as little as possible, leaving no trace. It allowed him to assume the prime ministership as a cleanskin, free of the taint of political wheeling and dealing. The cost was that he remained relatively unknown. The solution, however, was to be found in the consolidation of a persona that had started to take shape as Morrison got closer to the top of the game: ‘ScoMo’.

ScoMo—a self-deprecatory nickname redolent of locker room banter—is the tag of an ‘ordinary bloke’, albeit one doing an extraordinary job. It is an appellation peculiarly suited to the story being constructed around the Morrison persona. In the frantic months before the campaign proper, Morrison turned to filling in the clutter-free outline of ScoMo with the broad brushstrokes that would characterise his campaign performance (see Kelly 2018: 30).

ScoMo signified authenticity, and Morrison's supporters supplied the details. Of the daggy, blokey, suburban dad schtick that became the abiding impression of ScoMo, friend (and former Howard staffer) Dave Gazard insisted:

What you see is what you get. He wants to go to the footy, he wants to see the Sharks [his rugby team], he walks around in a T-shirt and shorts, he wears a baseball cap, he goes to church. That is him ... He is the son of a cop, grew up in suburban Sydney, a curry night cooking at home is his idea of a great night. He is a pretty normal guy. (Snow 2019a: 33)

The ScoMo persona also benefited from Morrison's avowed religiosity. While not unique among Australian politicians in professing his Christian faith, Morrison was unusual among prime ministers in his adherence to an evangelical creed, Pentecostalism. For him, however, it was a private issue, a matter of faith and conduct, not a 'policy handbook' (see Snow 2019a: 33). Questions about the disparity between the harsh border regime he had instituted and 'Christian compassion', or about policies directed to material acquisition for the enterprising while welfare provision was trimmed, could be subsumed by Pentecostalism's focus on God and the hereafter, attention to personal salvation rather than collective justice, preferment for those who have been 'saved' and belief that material success flows to the godly (Almond 2019). Hardball politics could be justified in the battle against evil. However, Morrison showed little inclination to proselytise; it did not fit the relaxed, suburban dad schtick he was developing. Yet the sincerity of his beliefs could be read as a manifestation of principle—a shield against the charge of being a calculating opportunist (see Boyce 2019).

What you see is what you get—well, not exactly, as we argue, but ScoMo was the screen that made the hitherto anonymous prime minister someone to whom you could relate and obscured what he had done to get to the top. It replaced the tarnished Liberal brand: 'The government brand became Morrison himself' (Crowe 2019: 6). It signalled the Coalition's connection to and understanding of 'quiet Australians'. It was given momentum by Morrison's self-belief; he could persuade himself of any position that he determined to be right and he believed in the schtick. And it facilitated the relentless simplification of the Coalition's campaign as a contest between ScoMo and Shorten.

Morrison, the campaigner

Once the campaign was under way, Morrison proved remarkably effective on the road. His self-confidence and determination were manifest, but the affable ScoMo was careful to appear positive rather than confrontational in these settings. The impression of authenticity was all important. Constantly travelling between different settings, cities, States and marginal seats, his stamina and task orientation were extraordinary.

His savvy marketing skills and long-established habit of controlling communication served him well. Ready with simplistic slogans and aphorisms ('If you have a go, you'll get a go!'), but adept in smothering unwelcome questions with verbosity and talking over the top of his interlocutors (see, for example, ABC 2019b), he stayed relentlessly on message. The core of the message was always the assertion of the danger of a Labor victory, summed up by the slogan 'The Bill you can't afford', which had been workshopped by the Liberal campaign team. The tactic was to turn every question into a question about the Labor Party, its ambitious program and especially its leader: 'It's a choice between me and Bill Shorten, nothing else', Morrison said repeatedly, including at his campaign launch.

This emphasis on personalisation was calculated to disrupt Labor's efforts to focus the debate on policy. Such commitments as Morrison made were inordinately general—'It is my vision ... to keep the promise of Australia'—and typically framed as a counter to the Labor risk: tax cuts against Labor's 'class warfare' tax reform proposals; cheaper energy versus Labor's unrealistic emissions abatement targets and reckless commitment to costly transitions in energy supply; cuts to immigration (with many references to Labor's failure to secure the borders); and maintenance of a sound economy, 'back in the black', as opposed to Labor's alleged incapacity to manage money. There was, however, no broader agenda. In three leaders' debates, Shorten tried to target this lack, but as Katherine Murphy observed:

The Liberal leader has a well-honed talent for getting out from under ... Morrison is a politician who thinks like a campaign director and carries an invisibility cloak. Going up against Morrison in a head-to-head is a bit like wrestling smoke. (Murphy 2019b)

Instead, Shorten was pushed back by Morrison's interjections and questions into elaborating the detail of Labor's policies, leaving himself open to interrogation on costings and equivocation on issues that were not yet fully resolved. Arguably, the constant disruption and confrontation in which Morrison indulged during the debates—including standing over Shorten in the final debate, which prompted the riposte, 'You're a classic space invader'—worked against the affable ScoMo persona; the studio audiences gave the debates to Shorten. But, interestingly, the response of television viewers appeared to contradict that of those in the room, perhaps indicating the doubts among voters about Labor's ambition and an appreciation of Morrison's efforts to force Shorten to 'come clean'.

While Morrison was the star performer, holding the stage, both the content and the targeting of what he presented relied on the ground campaign run by the Liberal Party's Federal Director, Andrew Hirst, and his deployment of key operatives from the polling and research firm Crosby Textor Group (C|T), which had been associated from its beginnings with the Liberal Party. Hirst, who had worked for Abbott and later for C|T, called on particular C|T colleagues to assist the Liberal campaign. Their skill was in the polling that indicated the path to victory in marginal seats, in social media targeting of people most likely to respond to the Coalition's message and in the tactics of the negative campaign (Bourke 2019; Lau and Rovner 2009; Martin 2004; and see Chapter 23, this volume).

While Liberal strategists claimed that Morrison effectively tapped into the aspirations of middle Australia (see Snow 2019c), the reality was more complicated and illustrated how targeted messaging, fostering negative affect, drew on social division and fostered the aggregation of localised resentment. Middle Australia's aspirations were not the drivers; the schism was between young workers in the cities and retirees and underemployed people in the regions. It was the fears of the latter to which the Coalition spoke, and it was in these regions that Morrison was most active (Dennis 2019; Megalogenis 2019; and Part 2 of this volume).

Bill Shorten: The unequal protégé?

Two days before polling day came news of the passing of Labor's longest-serving prime minister, Bob Hawke. The loss of a Labor legend and the parallels in background between Shorten and Hawke meant that conjecture focused particularly on how it might influence voter

sentiment towards the Opposition. In his 2016 memoir cum personal political manifesto, Shorten had written that his political coming of age occurred in the early 1980s, coinciding with the election to office of the Hawke Government (Shorten 2016: 23–27). He was, in other words, a Hawke-era Laborite. Shorten's pre-parliamentary career as an Australian Workers' Union (AWU) official, culminating in a high-profile stint as its national secretary, had long invited comparisons with Hawke. It was during his time in the trade union movement, according to Shorten, that he fashioned an operating style of consensus leadership that was also redolent of Hawke. Considering these symmetries between the men, the timing of Hawke's passing—on the cusp of what was widely anticipated to be a likely Shorten victory—had almost a providential feel.

Yet, ironically, the Shorten campaign of 2019 was, in its fundamentals, designed around the reality that he was no Hawke. His leadership path to the contest more closely resembled, if anything, that of the rival Hawke dramatically deposed on the day of the calling of the 1983 federal election, the luckless Bill Hayden (for an account of these events, see Kelly 1984). Like Hayden, Shorten had inherited the leadership following a demoralising Labor election loss (albeit in Hayden's case he became leader following the second of two landslide Labor defeats suffered under Gough Whitlam in 1975 and 1977). Like Hayden, Shorten had made substantial ground in his first election as leader to place Labor within striking distance of government. Both had won regard for building around them a stable and united shadow ministerial team and for overseeing a substantial renovation of Labor's policy program. Like Hayden, however, Shorten was continuously dogged by questions about his lack of personal appeal to the electorate. Both men were the butt of regular criticism for their stolid communication style and ungainly appearance. In Hayden's case, the nagging doubts caused by his relative unpopularity were ultimately what precipitated him being pressured by his parliamentary colleagues to step aside for Hawke on the day that Malcolm Fraser (caught out by the Labor leadership change) triggered the 1983 election. In words that became part of Australian political folklore, Hayden bitterly declared at his parting press conference: 'I believe that a drover's dog could lead the Labor Party to victory the way the country is and the way the opinion polls are' (quoted in Kelly 1984: 388).

The difference in 2019 was that Labor had no Hawke-like messiah waiting in the wings and, even if there had been an obvious charismatic alternative, the party's revised 2013 rules for the selection and deselection

of leaders would have impeded any five-minutes-to-midnight change. For Labor, it was the unpopular Shorten or bust. To put it another way, the Labor campaign became a test of whether the so-called drover's dog could actually win (Strangio 2019).

The Shorten campaign: The weight of expectation

Amid the leadership instability that had been a defining feature of Australian politics over the previous decade, Shorten stood out as an exception as he embarked on the 2019 election campaign. In his nearly six years as Labor leader, he had been pitted against three different Coalition prime ministers and he was the first Opposition leader to enjoy such security of tenure since Kim Beazley (1996–2001). Before that, Whitlam, Arthur Calwell, H.V. Evatt and Robert Menzies were the only other Opposition leaders since the Second World War to have gone to the electors in at least two consecutive elections, and of them, only Whitlam and Menzies became prime minister. Yet, unlike Shorten, neither of these two giants of Australian politics had been directly crowned Opposition leader following their party's loss of government. In that respect, Shorten was attempting to create his own piece of political history at the 2019 election.

If Morrison's persona was a work in progress in the minds of voters, Shorten's comparative longevity as Opposition leader meant he was a known commodity within the electorate. A trawl through past Newspolls confirms that his leadership ratings were chronically poor. Apart from a brief honeymoon in the months following his election as Opposition leader in October 2013, approval of his performance had outstripped disapproval only on a handful of occasions and then only barely. He had mostly trailed badly on the question of preferred prime minister. Eventually, the Labor Party's own post-election review conceded that Shorten's unpopularity contributed to the election loss (Emerson and Weatherill 2019: 8, 24–26).

The results of the 2016 Australian Election Study (AES) provide insight into the nature of Shorten's image problem among voters. Though Shorten scored creditably on the qualities of intelligence and knowledgeability (albeit not as highly as Turnbull), survey respondents marked him low on the qualities of honesty, trustworthiness and inspirational leadership

(Bean 2018: 244). Leadership trait polling on the leaders on the cusp of the 2019 campaign suggested this perception issue for Shorten was baked in. While the characteristics most associated with Morrison were 'well intentioned', followed by 'smug' and 'arrogant', for Shorten, it was 'untrustworthy' (Bickers 2019). The responses to the leaders by voter focus groups initiated by *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* suggested Shorten received some kudos for his doggedness and policy initiative. Yet the comment about Shorten that was singled out as having elicited 'knowing laughter and nodding' was that 'he's someone you'd like to punch in the head, really' (T. Wright 2019; Hartcher 2019b). Arguably, the publication of this was as revealing of a blithe normalising of incivility in public discourse as it was of sentiment towards the Labor leader.

Despite the liability of his unpopularity, Shorten entered the campaign favoured by the polls, the pundits and the bookies to become prime minister. In a series of profiles preceding and coinciding with the calling of the election, a motif was that of Shorten as a collegial leader anchored firmly in his party: 'Shorten is in fact selling Labor, not himself. The "team" dominates the talking points, and the "team" flanks Shorten ... 2019, for Labor, is a brand campaign, not a presidential one' (Murphy 2019a). Shorten consistently constructed his own leadership in those terms: 'The Labor Party is too big to be run by one person. The country is too big to be run by a messiah or by a dictator or by a one-trick pony' (Bramston 2019a). 'I'm not going to be a messiah. I don't believe in the ... authoritarian strongman' (ABC 2019a). It was a theme that reprised 2016 yet Shorten also emphasised it was an approach to leadership that had been confirmed by his experience over the previous six years. He stressed that Opposition had tested him and he had 'learnt a lot about myself ... These days I listen a lot more than I talk' (Bramston 2019a).

The delegation of policy initiative extended to ambitious elements of Labor's policy program such as negative gearing reform and the abolition of tax credits on franked dividends (see also Simms, Chapter 2, and Manwaring, Chapter 13, this volume). It was said that Shorten had required significant persuasion and time to embrace these and other measures. He explained it this way: 'I'm willing to take policy risks after I have thought about all the angles' (Snow 2019b). The boldness of the program implied confidence in Labor's position. But, according to Shorten, it was also informed by recent political history, particularly the predicament in which the Coalition found itself in 2013 after it won office on the back of an Abbott-led crusade that accentuated the negative

and was threadbare in constructive policies. Shorten compared recent incoming governments and prime ministers to ‘the proverbial dog that caught the truck. What do we do now?’ (quoted in Tingle 2019: 30).

Favouritism imposed a heavy weight of expectation on Shorten and, in combination with the party’s substantial reform agenda, it would be noted that this impacted on the dynamics of the campaign: the onus of proof was inverted, with the Opposition leader viewed more akin to an incumbent than a prime ministerial aspirant (Aly 2019). Shorten’s campaign inner circle comprised his deputy, Tanya Plibersek, shadow treasurer Chris Bowen and Labor’s Senate Leader, Penny Wong (Bramston 2019b). Wong’s fellow Senator Kristina Keneally was ‘captain’ of the campaign’s ‘Bill Bus’ and was described as playing a mix of ‘confidant, sounding board, media wrangler, morale booster and, where necessary, attack dog’ (S. Wright 2019). While behind the scenes men were equally integral to Shorten’s campaign team—it was reported his chief of staff, Ryan Liddell, was the person he trusted above anyone else (Bramston 2019b)—the public prominence of women in Shorten’s entourage was not lost on commentators (for example, Overington 2019). This culminated at Labor’s official launch when Shorten was introduced by a quartet of women: Queensland Premier, Annastacia Palaszczuk, Wong, Plibersek and his wife, Chloe. The launch itself represented a celebration of Shorten’s achievements in healing the party’s wounds of 2010–13, building a unified team and enabling a comprehensive program as telegraphed by the choreographed images of the joint entrance of Rudd and Gillard and of Shorten accompanied on stage post policy speech by his entire shadow ministry. The program was described as ‘the sum of their collective effort, not a postscript trailing a presidential figure’ (Murphy 2019c).

For all the determined construction of Shorten as a team captain, modern election campaigns inevitably default to a principal spokesperson. Shorten began scratchily in that light, fumbling details on complex areas such as superannuation and the costings of Labor’s climate policy. Though minor missteps, they were eagerly seized on by his critics in the News Corp media (for example, Kenny 2019; see also Wanna, Chapter 19, this volume). Shorten subsequently conceded an initial sluggishness: ‘The first week of the campaign smartened me up. I stepped up a gear, no question ... [I realised] the years of policy work itself won’t do the story ... I need to tell the story’ (Snow 2019b). In retrospect at least, a failure to distil a focused, readily understood and reassuring narrative from Labor’s extensive agenda would be recognised as a weakness of

Shorten's presentation throughout the campaign: 'I didn't hear Shorten, as his party's chief storyteller, tell a persuasive story about his policies ... [by polling day] what most voters had seen and heard from Labor was clutter' (Carney 2019).

Shorten was judged by studio audiences to have bested Morrison in the first two of the three televised leadership debates (see above) and a reasonable assessment of the final contest hosted by the ABC was that the Prime Minister was 'across detail' whereas his opponent was 'more emotive and vibrant' (Shanahan 2019). Probably Shorten's most arresting media performance of the campaign was a solo appearance on the ABC's *Q&A* program in which he gave flesh to his aspiration to provide equality of opportunity for all Australians by relating the story of his mother's unfulfilled career aspirations, which also featured in his campaign launch (McMahon 2019). That moment became engulfed in controversy when Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* and some other Murdoch tabloids ran a tawdry story cavilling at the accuracy of Shorten's account of his mother's employment history (Caldwell 2019)—an overreach that inspired an emotional rebuttal by the Opposition leader and elicited public sympathy for him from Morrison, although the Prime Minister shrewdly used it to reinforce his core campaign message by declaring that the election was 'not about our families ... it's about the choice between Bill Shorten and myself as prime minister' (Worthington 2019). The veteran journalist Michelle Grattan wrote that, in the wake of Shorten's passionate denunciation of the News Corp report, some 'old Labor hands' were comparing it to his appearances during the 2006 Beaconsfield mine disaster when, as an AWU official, he had first captured national attention. Shorten, who 'over the years has been unable to persuade voters to like him', observed Grattan (2019a), 'had suddenly been humanised'.

By election day, the final opinion polls showed Shorten's leadership ratings had inched up during the campaign but were still in the negative. Yet with Labor maintaining a decisive edge in the two-party-preferred estimates, he remained overwhelming favourite to become prime minister. In the meantime, two events 48 hours out from polling day—one planned (Shorten delivering his last major set piece address at Blacktown Hall, the scene of Whitlam's famous 1972 campaign launch) and one unforeseen (the announcement of Hawke's death that same evening)—had the combined effect of reinforcing the impression of a campaign and a leader firmly in the embrace of Labor history. On polling morning, another veteran commentator, Paul Kelly, while sharing the expectation that Shorten was

likely to lead his party to victory, nonetheless noted ominously that he had failed to engender inspiration to the last: ‘At the end Shorten ... invoked the Whitlam spirit trying to enervate his campaign and inject it with the 1972 “it’s time” enthusiasm that it has manifestly been missing’ (Kelly 2019a).

Conclusion

The drover’s dog could not win. In the post-mortems that followed Labor’s unexpected defeat, including that conducted by his own party, Shorten’s lack of personal appeal was identified as a significant contributing factor. One columnist demanded: ‘How was it possible the party saddled itself with a leader who, by any reasonable measure, was one of the least popular and most distrusted politicians in the entire country’ (Walker 2019). It was an assessment backed by suggestions since before the campaign and acknowledged by Labor retrospectively that Shorten was particularly poorly received in Queensland (Savva 2019a; Emerson and Weatherill 2019: 26)—the State that was instrumental in the party’s defeat. Liberal insiders divulged the fact that pivotal to the Coalition’s revival strategy and victory had been the twin targeting of Shorten’s leadership and Labor’s tax reform measures as encapsulated in the slogan: ‘The Bill you can’t afford’ (Bourke 2019; Markson and Devine 2019). The post-mortems—again, including the party’s own—also attached blame to Labor’s policy overreach, but here, too, Shorten was implicated both for misreading the electorate’s mood and for his deficiencies in translating that program into a clear and compelling case for change.

There was speculation following the election that Shorten might not have been fully reconciled to elements of Labor’s election agenda and that his support for them had been the price ‘to buttress his leadership internally’ (Kelly 2019b). This notion added to an impression—accentuated in hindsight—that Shorten had effaced himself in relation to his party by his campaign: running on an audacious reform agenda that belied his natural political caution and eschewing predominance in favour of the team. This conjured up an observation made at the time of the 2016 election about the test that still lay ahead for Shorten as Labor leader. He had proved himself skilled at harnessing the talents of his colleagues and tending to relationships within the party, but the finest Labor leaders had balanced that art with being ‘prepared, where necessary, to cajole and

impose their will on the party', to transcend it by building an autonomous following to augment its appeal (Strangio 2016). Fatally weakened by his inability to create a connection with the public, Shorten had never managed that evolution. Instead, as one commentator noted at the start of the 2019 campaign, his time at the head of the party was 'a study of recessing himself in the Labor leadership' (Murphy 2019a).

On the other hand, the Coalition victory was an unambiguous triumph for Scott Morrison—success against expectations. Where Labor had counted on a program-driven appeal, the Coalition eschewed policy detail for tactics: the creation of doubt about everything Labor proposed, sophisticated social media analytics and the presentation of a leader who claimed sound economic management and emphasised his understanding of the challenges and the aspirations of 'quiet Australians'.

The election outcome highlights the disparity between the expectations of political insiders and those of the many for whom the demands of daily life dominate and who seek short cuts to simplify their decision and a leader whose message substantiates their concerns or clarifies options. The gamble on personalisation worked; Morrison proved just such a leader. Despite his rise in the party, he had contrived to remain an enigma. Relatively unknown outside the 'Canberra bubble', he could construct a persona—ScoMo—attuned to the needs of the campaign: the ordinary bloke who understood common people and could give substance to their concerns by amplifying doubts about Shorten, his all-too-well-known opponent.

The circumstances of the 2019 election result—the pronounced personalisation of the Coalition's campaign and the thinness of its re-election policy program—undeniably bestowed on Morrison enormous authority and unusual latitude. As well placed as any leader to end the prime ministerial instability that has been a defining feature of Australian politics for a decade, his task would now be to capitalise on that opportunity.

References

- Almond, Philip C. 2019. 'Five aspects of Pentecostalism that shed light on Scott Morrison's politics'. *The Conversation*, 23 May. theconversation.com/five-aspects-of-pentecostalism-that-shed-light-on-scott-morrison-politics-117511.
- Aly, Waleed. 2019. 'Why Shorten's mum is pivotal'. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 May: 22.
- Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). 2019a. 'Bill Shorten on Q&A'. *Q&A*, [ABC TV], 6 May. www.abc.net.au/qanda/2019-06-05/11037828.
- Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). 2019b. 'Prime Minister Scott Morrison discusses the Coalition's policies'. 7.30, [ABC TV], 6 May. www.abc.net.au/7.30/scott-morrison-discusses-the-coalitions-policies/11085546.
- Bean, Clive. 2018. 'Changing leaders, "Mediscare" and business as usual: Electoral behaviour'. In *Double Disillusion: The 2016 Australian Federal Election*, edited by Anika Gauja, Peter Chen, Jennifer Curtin and Juliet Pietsch, 235–53. Canberra: ANU Press. doi.org/10.22459/DD.04.2018.10.
- Bickers, Claire. 2019. 'It's smug versus dodgy'. *Herald Sun*, [Melbourne], 6 April: 16.
- Bourke, Latika. 2019. 'Beating Labor at their own game'. *Sunday Age*, [Melbourne], 26 May: 12.
- Boyce, James. 2019. 'The Devil and Scott Morrison: What do we know about the Prime Minister's Pentecostalism?'. *The Monthly*, February: 10–14.
- Bramston, Troy. 2019a. 'New era ambition of wannabe PM'. *Weekend Australian*, [Inquirer], 23–24 March: 11–12.
- Bramston, Troy. 2019b. 'Shorten squad at the ready, waiting for the call'. *Weekend Australian*, 6–7 April: 6.
- Caldwell, Anna. 2019. 'Shorten's mother of all lapses'. *Daily Telegraph*, [Sydney], 8 May: 4–5.
- Carney, Shaun. 2019. 'Labor was a victim of policy clutter'. *Herald Sun*, [Melbourne], 21 May: 20.
- Crowe, David. 2019. 'Liberal's campaign was defined by desperate ploys'. *Sunday Age*, [Melbourne], 19 May: 6.

- Denniss, Richard. 2019. 'The Morrison election: What we know now'. *The Monthly*, June. www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2019/june/1559397600/richard-denniss/morrison-election-what-we-know-now.
- Emerson, Craig and Jay Weatherill. 2019. *Review of Labor's 2019 Election Campaign*. Canberra: ALP. alp.org.au/media/2043/alp-campaign-review-2019.pdf.
- Grattan, Michelle. 2019a. 'Another moment of "connection" for Bill Shorten'. *The Canberra Times*, 11 May. www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6118232/another-moment-of-connection-for-bill-shorten/.
- Grattan, Michelle. 2019b. 'Against the odds, Scott Morrison wants to be returned as Prime Minister. But who the bloody hell is he?'. *The Conversation*, 13 May. theconversation.com/against-the-odds-scott-morrison-wants-to-be-returned-as-prime-minister-but-who-the-bloody-hell-is-he-116732.
- Hartcher, Peter. 2019a. 'Depressing contest means we have to consider the choice of parties and policies, not personalities'. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 April. www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/depressing-contest-means-we-have-to-consider-the-choice-of-parties-and-policies-not-personalities-20190410-p51cya.html.
- Hartcher, Peter. 2019b. 'Focus groups flag danger for leaders'. *The Age*, [Melbourne], 4 May: 12.
- Kelly, Paul. 1984. *The Hawke Ascendancy: A Definitive Account of its Origins and Climax 1975–1983*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson.
- Kelly, Paul. 2019a. 'Radical trap of a Shorten win'. *Weekend Australian*, [Inquirer], 18–19 May: 34.
- Kelly, Paul. 2019b. 'Post-material push cannot conquer the nation'. *The Australian*, 12 June: 12.
- Kelly, Sean. 2018. 'Leave no trace: The story of Scott Morrison'. *The Monthly*, November: 22–33.
- Kenny, Chris. 2019. 'Shorten's blunders deplete his charge'. *Weekend Australian*, [Inquirer], 20–21 April: 19.
- Lau, Richard R. and Ivy Brown Rovner. 2009. 'Negative Campaigning'. *Annual Review of Political Science* 12: 285–306. doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.10.071905.101448.
- McMahon, Neil. 2019. 'Q&A: Bill Shorten utters the most powerful and personal sentence of the campaign'. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 May. www.smh.com.au/entertainment/tv-and-radio/q-and-a-bill-shorten-utters-the-most-powerful-and-personal-sentence-of-the-campaign-20190507-p51kp6.html.

- Markson, Sharri and Miranda Devine. 2019. 'How Scomo pulled off a miracle'. *Daily Telegraph*, [Sydney], 25 May: 42.
- Martin, Paul S. 2004. 'Inside the Black Box of Negative Campaign Effects: Three Reasons Why Negative Campaigns Mobilize'. *Political Psychology* 25(4): 545–62. doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2004.00386.x.
- Martin, Sarah. 2019. 'Scott Morrison: "Master of the middle" may pull the Coalition out of a muddle'. *The Guardian*, 21 April. www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/apr/21/scott-morrison-master-of-the-middle-may-pull-coalition-out-of-a-muddle?CMP=Share_i%E2%80%A6.
- Megalogenis, George. 2019. '2019 Election: The shock of the new normal—Why the election result shouldn't have surprised the major parties'. *The Monthly*, June. www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2019/june/1559397600/george-megalogenis/2019-election-shock-new-normal.
- Murphy, Katharine. 2019a. 'Labor's path to victory is open—but have voters made peace with Bill Shorten?'. *The Guardian*, 11 April. www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/apr/11/labors-path-to-victory-is-open-but-have-voters-made-peace-with-bill-shorten.
- Murphy, Katharine. 2019b. 'How Shorten the redeemer met Morrison the disruptor—and decided to fight back'. *The Guardian*, 20 April. www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/apr/20/how-shorten-the-redeemer-met-morrison-the-disruptor-and-decided-to-fight-back?CMP.
- Murphy, Katharine. 2019c. 'Former PMs bury the hatchet in show of unity at Labor campaign launch'. *The Guardian*, 5 May. www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/may/05/former-pms-bury-the-hatchet-in-show-of-unity-at-labor-campaign-launch.
- Overington, Caroline. 2019. 'Bill's entourage hints at female-voter problem'. *The Australian*, 17 April: 5.
- Savva, Niki. 2019a. 'Libs are lucky: What if Labor had a popular leader?'. *The Australian*, 14 March: 12.
- Savva, Niki. 2019b. *Plots and Prayers: Malcolm Turnbull's Demise and Scott Morrison's Ascension*. Melbourne: Scribe Press.
- Shanahan, Dennis. 2019. 'ScoMo's details v Bill's emotions'. *The Australian*, 9 May: 1.
- Shorten, Bill. 2016. *For the Common Good: Reflections on Australia's Future*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

- Sky News. 2019. 'Bad blood/new blood'. *Sky News*, 25–26 June.
- Snow, Deborah. 2019a. 'Can this man pick up the pieces?'. *The Age*, [Melbourne], 4 May: 32–33.
- Snow, Deborah. 2019b. 'Bill Shorten's final dash in the long road to the top'. *Sun Herald*, [Melbourne], 12 May: 11–12.
- Snow, Deborah. 2019c. 'How Morrison effectively tapped into middle Australia'. *The Age*, [Melbourne], 20 May. www.theage.com.au/federal-election-2019/how-morrison-successfully-tapped-into-middle-australia-20190519-p51p1c.html.
- Strangio, Paul. 2016. 'Shorten the consensus leader unites a fractured Labor, but it may not quite be enough'. *The Conversation*, 30 June. theconversation.com/shorten-the-consensus-leader-unites-a-fractured-labor-but-it-may-not-quite-be-enough-61741.
- Strangio, Paul. 2019. 'After six years as Opposition Leader, history beckons Bill Shorten. Will the "drover's dog" have its day?'. *The Conversation*, 13 May. theconversation.com/after-six-years-as-opposition-leader-history-beckons-bill-shorten-will-the-drovers-dog-have-its-day-115490.
- Tingle, Laura. 2019. 'Between fear and ideas: Bill Shorten on the road ahead'. *The Monthly*, March: 19–30.
- Walker, Tony. 2019. 'Shorten failed to sell complex reform program'. *The Age*, [Melbourne], 20 May: 26.
- Williams, Pamela. 2019. 'The war on Malcolm: Behind the scenes of an overthrow'. *The Monthly*, February: 22–41.
- Worthington, Brett. 2019. 'Bill Shorten accuses the Daily Telegraph of "new low" for federal election story on his mother'. *ABC News*, 8 May. www.abc.net.au/news/2019-05-08/bill-shorten-slams-daily-telegraph-federal-election-mother-story/11090238.
- Wright, Shane. 2019. 'The rise and rise of Kristina Keneally inside Bill Shorten's inner circle'. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 April. www.smh.com.au/federal-election-2019/the-rise-and-rise-of-kristina-keneally-inside-bill-shorten-s-inner-circle-20190413-p51duq.html.
- Wright, Tony. 2019. 'Stumped for words: Melburnian panel finds little love for top pollies'. *The Age*, [Melbourne], 4 May: 12.

This text is taken from *Morrison's Miracle: The 2019 Australian Federal Election*, edited by Anika Gauja, Marian Sawyer and Marian Simms, published 2020 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/MM.2020.06