

# Australia Post fightback splits the Coalition!



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Lead Editorial

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The showdown scene in Senate Estimates on 23 March, when Nationals Senator Bridget McKenzie (far left) took on her Coalition colleague Liberal Senator Jane Hume (far right, front) for trying to block discussion about the secret BCG report. Photo: Screenshot

The governing Coalition is splitting at the seams, with major cracks now appearing regularly. In a Senate Estimates hearing on Australia Post on 23 March, Nationals Senator Bridget McKenzie and the Liberal “Minister for Bankers” Senator Jane Hume descended into a yelling match when McKenzie interrogated Australia Post Chairman Lucio Di Bartolomeo about the Boston Consulting Group review of Australia Post, commissioned 15 months ago to inform him as incoming chair. This is the secret but infamous report that was intended to sabotage CEO Christine Holgate’s successful turnaround of Australia Post, which was interfering with plans to privatise the national asset.

Hume intervened to shield Di Bartolomeo from the questions—something she had refused to do in the 22 October hearing when ALP Senator Kimberley Kitching attacked Holgate for rewarding executives with Cartier watches. Deflecting from McKenzie’s questioning, Hume insisted that because the government commissioned the report, and it remains government property, “it is inappropriate for Australia Post employees to speak to its contents”. When McKenzie fired back, ridiculing the notion that Di Bartolomeo had not seen the report, *since it was written for him*, Hume continued to run interference and the Committee Chair was forced to break up the public argument between the two members of the same government.

With the pressure from an informed constituency behind them, for many MPs the government’s intractable defence of doomed policy positions has become intolerable. Having recently lost MP Craig Kelly, who quit the Liberal party to sit as an independent, the government is only holding on by a thin thread. This time last week, on 17 March, it could not muster the numbers to pass its proposed amendments to responsible lending laws—another indefensible position that gives the banks blessing to further inflate the housing bubble.

Events of recent days, occurring on the back of revelations of the rape of a young parliamentary employee, have brought this situation to a head. Prime Minister Scott Morrison is increasingly trapped in a political death-spiral. Headlines globally are ringing death knells for his leadership.

The catalyst is his reaction to the mistreatment of women in Canberra, and while the attention is on sexual abuses, Morrison was already battered and bruised by popular outrage at his personal attack on Christine Holgate. Even his expression of shock during a 23 March press conference for new revelations of debauchery going on inside the Canberra bubble rang hollow, as Morrison could not match the outrage or fervour he had displayed at “discovering” a (female) CEO had awarded

executives with watches for saving the future of one of our few remaining national assets (something which stood out to many at the time as unusually passionate for “Scotty from marketing”).

Responding in that press conference to Sky News reporter Andrew Clennell, Morrison dug a new hole for himself, by raising another alleged sexual harassment incident at Sky parent company News Corp, owned by Morrison supporter Rupert Murdoch. After News Corp issued a statement denying the allegation, Morrison rushed to apologise in a Facebook post. But there has been no such apology for wronged CEO Holgate (p. 3).

The country is facing numerous crises which require real leadership. Nature has thrown them all at us before—fire, flood and disease among them—and they all have fairly straightforward solutions, but it is man-made policy that will not allow us to face them down effectively. Those policies are the Achilles heel of this government, and all governments of recent decades which have pursued the neoliberal economic ideologies that destroyed our economy. The privatisation of Australia Post is emblematic of the outrage that has reached boil-over point. Our governing elite are used to a compliant public and prominent personalities who roll over when told to do so, be they from politics or business. That is not happening, and it has left them exposed and making bad mistakes that will bring their agenda undone.

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