

What did the Australian Labor Party know about former PM Morrison's secret ministerial appointments?

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In two interviews over recent days, prominent federal Labor MP Ed Husic has stated that he was aware in 2021 that former Liberal-National Coalition Prime Minister Scott Morrison had become the “decision maker” for the industry, science, resources and energy portfolio.

Husic made the comments in the aftermath of revelations, a week ago, that Morrison was secretly sworn in to five key ministerial portfolios during his prime ministership, including the industry and resources super-portfolio. His statements cast substantial doubt on the claim by Labor MPs that they were completely in the dark about Morrison's ministerial positions until they were reported in the press earlier this month.

Husic is Labor's current minister for energy and science. He held those shadow portfolios in 2021, when the ministerial position was secretly occupied by Morrison.

In March 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, Morrison assumed the sweeping powers of the health ministry and well as the finance portfolio. In April 2021, he appointed himself minister over the super-portfolio of industry, science, energy and resources. In May 2021, Morrison also became a secret co-minister in the powerful Home Affairs portfolio, covering federal intelligence and policing, as well as the treasury.

As the WSWs has explained, the concentration of key ministerial powers under the prime minister was nothing less than a turn to openly authoritarian forms of rule. It formed part of a broader onslaught on civil liberties amid the pandemic. This was motivated by fear of an eruption of working-class opposition, amid

the social crisis intensified by COVID and the undermining of public health in the interests of profit, which culminated in the open adoption of a “let it rip” coronavirus policy last December.

The Labor Party was fully complicit in this broader offensive, including by its participation in the National Cabinet, an extra-constitutional entity that has ruled in secrecy and by decree throughout the pandemic. That body was established the same month Morrison began his acquisition of ministerial powers, in March 2020.

Labor has sought to cover up these broader questions, presenting the ministerial appointments as solely the result of Morrison's personal proclivities. Labor, which assumed office after the federal election in May, has maintained the National Cabinet, as a permanent institution, and has deployed its secrecy provisions to stymie media inquiries.

A key component of its response has been the assertion that current Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, his senior colleagues and the Labor Party as a whole knew nothing about Morrison's actions, when they were underway.

But Husic's interviews suggest otherwise.

On Friday, he appeared alongside former Coalition Energy Minister Angus Taylor on a 2GB radio program. Husic ridiculed Taylor's claims to have been unaware that Morrison had secretly sworn himself into the Liberal MP's ministry.

Husic stated: “I'm sorry, I don't know if Angus did say whether or not he knew at the time that he had, within government, Scott Morrison shadowing him. I do know, because I was opposition industry minister that Scott Morrison had set himself up to be the decision-maker on grants in Angus's portfolio when he

was the minister.”

On the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s Radio National network this morning, Husic expanded on the same point. He stated: “I was concerned last year when I saw Morrison had made himself the decision maker [for the industry and resources portfolio], wrote to him and his people didn’t think there was an issue.”

Husic noted that Morrison had taken direct control of the Modern Manufacturing Initiative under the industry portfolio. He stated that Morrison had, in that capacity, approved 17 grant projects prior to the May federal election, more than half of which were in Coalition seats.

The clear implication of Husic’s statement is that Morrison made those decisions in his capacity as secret resources and industry minister. This would contradict Morrison’s claim that he only exercised the ministerial powers once, to block the controversial Pep-11 gas project last year.

More significant, however, is what exactly Husic knew, and when. His interviewers, 2GB’s Deborah Knight and the ABC’s Patricia Karvelas, did not ask the Labor MP a single follow up question about his contemporaneous knowledge of Morrison’s ministerial positions.

Knight and Karvelas are senior reporters, with close ties to the political establishment. Their failure to ask any of the obvious questions was a political decision, bound up with the attempts to cover-up the implications of Morrison’s assumption of sweeping anti-democratic powers.

The questions that should have been asked of Husic, but were not, include:

1. Do your statements about Morrison becoming the industry and resources “decision maker” mean, as they imply, that you were aware he had assumed and was exercising ministerial powers? When did you become aware of this? Did you know that Morrison was formally sworn in to the ministry by the governor-general?
2. Did you discuss these matters with Albanese and other senior Labor ministers? If not, why not?
3. What did you state in your letter to “Morrison’s people” voicing “concerns” over his exercise of ministerial powers? Why did you simply drop the matter when they replied that there was no issue?
4. Why didn’t you raise your “concerns” publicly or

in the federal parliament?

The *World Socialist Web Site* contacted Husic’s federal office today, in an attempt to pose these and other questions. Several phone calls went unanswered and messages were not returned.

It is inconceivable that Morrison’s swearing in to key ministerial portfolios was not widely known in political and media circles. The number of individuals in the Coalition government and state apparatus admitting to at least some knowledge continues to grow despite efforts to bury the issue. Husic’s comments give the first indication that the Labor Party, then in opposition, at the very least suspected what was taking place and said nothing.

A final question that Husic should answer: Isn’t it the case that you and Labor were cooperating with Morrison and the Coalition, in a conspiracy against the democratic rights of the Australian population?



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