When Daniel Andrews signalled his desire to extend Victoria’s state of emergency, which is due to expire on September 13, for a further 12 months, he suggested it was just a bit of harmless housekeeping to bring the state in line with arrangements in other states. That might be how the Victorian Premier sees it. The problem is that under his leadership, this “housekeeping” measure is like giving your cleaner an axe, rather than a broom.

This week, the not-so-artful dodger, whose government is singularly responsible for a hotel quarantine debacle that unleashed the second wave of COVID-19, attempted a power grab so dangerous that even some of his federal Labor colleagues told him to explain himself.

Two things must be dawning on Victorians. First, Andrews is like no leader the state — or the country — has seen in the modern era. He simply cannot be trusted with another 12-month extension of state of emergency powers. Secondly, their Premier is in a bind of his own making, and Victorians are paying for it.

There are mounting reasons why the Premier cannot be trusted with another 12 months of emergency powers: the negligence of his government over hotel quarantine; for weeks, Andrews and his ministers refused to come clean about the source of the outbreak, and they still won’t address the lines of responsibility; the continued denials about offers from the ADF to assist with hotel quarantine; suspending parliament; the double standards of allowing a Black Lives Matters protest during a state of emergency; no medical explanation for the curfew; and continuing double standards over the stage-four lockdown.

Melburnians are enduring the longest, most draconian restrictions any Western leader has imposed on citizens. The Victorian economy is in free fall: ANZ predicts a contraction that will cost $22bn; NAB puts the figure at $41bn. Data from the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services reveals the state has recorded a 33 per cent rise in children presenting to hospital with self-harm injuries in the past six weeks, compared to a year ago. Families are separated, kids are locked out of classrooms. Business is demanding an end to the lockdown before tumbleweeds start sprouting in Collins Street. Calling for a royal commission, even the Australian Medical Association has described the Andrews government decision to allow the BLM rally in Melbourne in March as one of many “missteps.”

Amid this economic and social carnage, Andrews imagined he could secure a 12-month extension for Victoria’s state of emergency, with little explanation. Sure, a backlash has led to a compromise being thrashed out with crossbenchers in the Victorian upper house. That the Victorian Premier tried it on in the first place is an insight into the soul of his leadership: Andrews is a modern textbook case that, even in democracy, there is room to learn that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

For good reason, key crossbencher and Reason Party leader Fiona Patten has urged the Andrews government to respect parliament by proposing COVID-specific laws. But Andrews won’t, and can’t, allow that.

From the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Victorian Premier has adopted a shock-and-awe strategy. Whereas the NSW government implemented rules using public health laws without declaring a state of emergency, the Andrews government declared a state of emergency on March 16 under Victoria’s Public Health and Wellbeing Act. Other states did the same.

The difference is that the Andrews government imposed the most draconian, arbitrary, disproportionate rules on Australians. Though his press conferences are long, he did it all with very little explanation or accountability. The shock-and-awe narrative has been reinforced at every press conference. The Premier’s tone has echoed his rules: dictatorial, unforgiving and unfeeling.

Victorians were told a game of golf would kill people. What did the medical advice say about that? Andrews tried to ban people in a relationship, but in different houses, from caring for one another. He threatened that police would go “door to door” to hunt down rule-breakers. In fact, at every stage, Andrews’s default setting has been to overreach, locking down Victorians like no other Australian leader, state or federal, has done.

Continuing that strategy, he extended the state of emergency six times for four-week periods over the past six months. With that due to expire, he wants the same emergency powers for another 12 months. After his government’s mismanagement of hotel quarantine unleashed the COVID second wave across Victoria, Andrews doubled down on his shock-and-awe strategy. In addition to even stricter lockdown rules under the continuing state of emergency, the Premier declared a state of disaster in early August. That gave the Police Minister extraordinary powers to suspend the operation of any legislation passed by parliament, control all movement into, within and out of Victoria, take possession and make use of any person’s property, and direct any government agency to do or refrain from doing any act.

Under section 23 (7) of Victoria’s Emergency Management Act, the Premier must report on the state of disaster and powers exercised under the Act to both houses of parliament as soon as practicable after a state of disaster has been declared. Instead, the Andrews government called on advice from the state’s Chief Health Officer to suspend parliament.

Ushering in the latest raft of lockdown rules, Chief Health Officer Brett Sutton spoke openly about the government’s “shock-and-awe” strategy aimed at forcing people to obey even more draconian and arbitrary restrictions.

The tragedy of the Premier’s shock-and-awe strategy is that it hasn’t conquered the health crisis, but it has apparently tamed a majority of Victorians. According to a Roy Morgan poll released on Thursday, an overwhelming majority of Victorians surveyed earlier in the week agree with almost all of the stage-four restrictions: 89 per cent agree that wearing masks should be compulsory in Victoria; 76 per cent think schools and daycare centres should not be open to everyone; 75 per cent agree restaurants, hotels, clubs and cafes should not be able to provide table service with proper social distancing; 72 per cent are onside with the 8pm-5am curfew in Melbourne and 71 per cent believe Melburnians should not be able to travel more than 5km from their homes.

The only pushback came from 52 per cent of Victorians over 65, the group most at risk from the virus, who presumably want to visit grandkids: they believe people should be able to visit immediate family.

This level of submission suggests the Premier has amassed powers by making Victorians more fearful than they need to be — aided and abetted by the media in Victoria. For example, it should have been a big news story that, during a press conference on August 19, Sutton admitted that for classification and reporting purposes, a COVID death may include someone who dies with COVID-19 even though their death “doesn’t have to be definitely from coronavirus”. He also said “in some instances, in aged care, there would have been some residents already receiving palliative care who became infected with coronavirus so it’s not definitive about whether they died with or from coronavirus”.

In other words, the official death tally is not an accurate gauge of the actual death tally. The upshot of Andrews’s handling of the virus receiving less scrutiny than, say, decisions of the Kennett government, is that he has been allowed to continue his shock-and-awe campaign for far too long.

And now, Andrews is so deeply wedded to that narrative, he is finding it hard to walk back from it. If he does, it will signal his response to the pandemic, with its tragic and still untold consequences, has been an epic overreaction. That’s why, this week, he pushed even further, demanding a 12-month extension of powers that will give Sutton and authorised officers powers to continue to make wide-ranging orders with no parliamentary oversight.

All politicians covet power. The nation is waiting for Victorians to realise Andrews covets more power than is healthy in a ­democracy.