

## Presidentialization in the Antipodes? The Australian Case Examined<sup>1</sup>

While much has been written about the presidentialization of politics across Europe very little attention has been given to the Australian case. Considering that Australia has very strong parties and prime ministers who have institutional advantages that far surpass anything the British prime minister for example has at their disposal, a systematic analysis of presidentialization in Australia is timely. This paper will argue that within the institutional limits imposed by a majoritarian parliamentary system, the Australian case shows a long term trend towards presidentialization as defined by Poguntke and Webb.<sup>2</sup> However, this is not uniform and unproblematic as Australia's distinctive institutional architecture means that the most compelling evidence of presidentialization is in how leaders interact with their parties rather than in how they actually govern.

### Introduction

Debates about whether political leaders are becoming more powerful have been fiercely fought over for decades. The roots of which can be traced to Britain in the 1960s and to the Mackintosh and Crossman thesis that cabinet government was dead and prime ministerial government the orthodoxy.<sup>3</sup> As the debate has evolved, so have the terms of reference and one offshoot has been the presidentialization thesis with Michael Foley's work seminal in this evolution.<sup>4</sup> While Foley's work was a systematic account of Britain, it was not until Poguntke and Webb adopted a comparative politics framework that the presidentialization thesis advanced beyond debates about indigenous idiosyncrasies to a discussion about the causal effects driving changes across democratic systems. While in Europe, Latin America and in parts of Asia the presidentialization thesis has been examined, critiqued and explored, Australian academics for the most part, have viewed the thesis as of limited value.<sup>5</sup> This is a mistake. Australia has an institutional architecture that provides an environment in which political leaders have the potential to be extremely powerful. Preferential voting in the lower house, publicly funded elections<sup>6</sup> and the prime minister having their own department are just some of the advantages that leaders of Australia's federal political parties possess. Thus, a systematic investigation of presidentialization in Australia will be a timely addition to the debate internationally.

The Poguntke and Webb presidentialization model is one of the more systematic conceptualisations of the thesis. At the heart of their model is the idea that there is inherent

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Poguntke and Paul Webb (eds.), *The Presidentialization of Politics: A comparative Study of Modern Democracies*, (Oxford, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Richard Crossman, 'Introduction', in *The English Constitution*, Walter Bagehot, (Fontana, 1963), p. 51. John Mackintosh, *The British Cabinet*, (Stevens, 1968).

<sup>4</sup> Michael Foley, *The British Presidency: Tony Blair and the Politics of Public Leadership* (Manchester, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> For Europe see Thomas Poguntke, 'The German Core Executive: Ever More Power to the Chancellor?' *APSA 2009*, Toronto. For Latin America see Jeffrey Cason and Tim Power, 'Presidentialization, Pluralization, and the Rollback of Itamaraty: Explaining Change in Brazilian Foreign Policy Making in the Cardoso-Lula Era', *International Political Science Review*, Vol 30 (2), p.117-140. For Asia see Ellis Krauss and Benjamin Nyblade, 'Presidentialization' in Japan? The Prime Minister, Media and Elections in Japan', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol 35 (2), p.357-368.

<sup>6</sup> Australia's system of funding elections is explained in Holmes (2012). Put simply, candidates and political parties are eligible to receive public funding if they receive at least four percent of first preference votes. While contentious, Holmes (2012: 5) notes that one of the negatives of such a system is that it reinforces the status quo.

tension between political parties and leaders.<sup>7</sup>As their model is a work of comparative politics, this allows the debate to move beyond comparing specific regime types, increasing its generalisability. The conceptualisation that Poguntke and Webb devised was based on what they perceived as the three distinct faces of presidentialization: the executive face, the party face and the electoral face. The executive face of presidentialization, while inter-related with the party face, is specifically focussed on how leaders interact with their governments. Any growth in the formal powers of leaders as well as evidence of autonomous decision making is central. In Poguntke and Webb's terms: "While partified government means governing through parties' presidentialized government implies governing past parties".<sup>8</sup>In the party face, Poguntke and Webb were looking for a "shift in intra-party power to the benefit of the leader".<sup>9</sup>This shift may be related to the third face, the electoral face, whereby the leader appeals over the party to the electorate for their support base. Usually this would be a result of structural changes to the party giving leaders more formal powers, allowing them to bypass various power bases within the party and/or as a result of a concentration of power and resources in the office of the leader.<sup>10</sup>The electoral face has three central components, campaign style, media focus and voting behaviour. Campaign style is about examining whether there has been a growing emphasis on leadership appeals in election campaigns. Media focus examines whether the media is focussing more on leaders than previously and voting behaviour is about examining if leaders are becoming more important in the choices of voters.<sup>11</sup>

Despite this conceptual clarity, the Poguntke and Webb model and the presidentialization thesis have been heavily criticised of late. In particular, Dowding has argued for the thesis "to be expunged from political science vocabulary".<sup>12</sup>Dowding contends that "the forces identified as presidentialization are better seen as personalisation of politics".<sup>13</sup>Moreover, he insists that any centralisation of decision making within the executive takes us further away from "presidentialism" and that any power prime ministers have accrued makes them less like the United States (US) president, not more, because prime ministers have always been more powerful. However, this paper contends that the personalisation thesis doesn't sufficiently account for structural changes within the executive and within parties which have enhanced the capacity for leaders to dominate. Also, the presidentialization thesis as conceptualised by Poguntke and Webb is *not* about specific regime types, but an ideal type of presidential system. Dowding certainly has a point about the differences between presidential and parliamentary systems and perhaps referring to the phenomenon as presidentialization, rather than pre-dominance and/or pre-eminence, as others prefer, can be problematic. But this obscures what the thesis is truly about, most notably, whether leaders are more powerful and central to politics than previously.<sup>14</sup>While critics have claimed that this is superficial political science, this paper argues that exploring whether leaders have the capacity to play a bigger role than previously is a seminal issue that cuts to the core of democratic leadership. Furthermore, considering the debate over whether leaders are becoming increasingly more

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<sup>7</sup> Poguntke and Webb, *The Presidentialization of Politics*, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.9.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p.9.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p.9.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p.10.

<sup>12</sup> Keith Dowding, 'The Prime Ministerialisation of the British Prime Minister', *Parliamentary Affairs*, published online April 6, 2012, Available from: <<http://pa.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2012/04/12/pa.gss007.abstract>>. Accessed 17 July 2012, p.1.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p.2.

<sup>14</sup> For use of pre-dominance and pre-eminence see Richard Heffernan, 'Prime Ministerial Predominance? Core Executive Politics in the UK', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 3, 347–372 and more recently Mark Bennister, *Prime Ministers in Power: Political Leadership in Britain and Australia*, (Palgrave, 2012), p. 20.

powerful or central to contemporary politics is far from settled, nothing about this approach seems controversial or trivial.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, this paper will use the Poguntke and Webb model to examine presidentialization in the Australian context using the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party (FPLP) as a case study. This paper will examine three leadership periods for signs of presidentialization. By examining leaders from one party, this paper will be able to plunge deeper into the dynamic forces that determine the relationship between leaders and their parties, which, in a system such as Australia's, strongly determines the manner in which they govern, and the way the party campaigns. Ultimately, this paper will show that within this setting of highly organised and dominant parties that presidentialization, as conceptualised by Poguntke and Webb, is most notable in the way leaders interact with their parties and the electorate than in how they govern. In the case of the FPLP, the leader has become increasingly dominant within the institutions of the party breaking free of many of the traditional constraints leaders may have been subjected to. The effect of this has been twofold. It has increased the intra-party power the leader possesses, but also allowed FPLP leaders to govern in a more autonomous and decentralised manner. Further enhancing this phenomenon has been: the decline of ideology based politics, a lack of policy differentiation between the major parties and election campaigns which have become increasingly personalised. Added together, this has enhanced the capacity and centrality of leaders within Australian federal politics. Although ironically, while this had made leaders stronger when things are going well in the polls, it has made them more vulnerable when they are weak. The three leadership periods of the FPLP that will be examined are Gough Whitlam (1967-1977), Bob Hawke (1983-1991) and Kevin Rudd (2006-2010). These three leadership periods represent three of the six post-war prime ministers from the FPLP. Undoubtedly, each period has a unique set of circumstances. However, these cases are similar enough so that generalisations about changes can be viewed as evidence of presidentialization as conceptualised by Poguntke and Webb. The structure of this paper will be based on Poguntke and Webb's three faces of presidentialization model. It will begin by examining the executive face followed by the party face and finally address the electoral face. In the conclusion it will offer some final remarks on the Australian case and the thesis more broadly.

## **Executive Face**

As previously mentioned, when examining the executive face the focus is on a shift in the power within the executive to the head of government, or in other words, the "leader's autonomy from the party in respect of *the business of the executive of the state*".<sup>16</sup> The Australian prime minister has always had institutional advantages that far exceeded those of the British prime minister. While Tony Blair may have attempted to create his own department within Downing Street, Australian prime ministers have had such a department, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), since 1971.<sup>17</sup> In spite of these comparative advantages, attempts have still been made to centralise decision making and to build a network of advisers beyond the traditional public service structures. This section will examine the growth of prime ministerial power during the three FPLP leadership periods.

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<sup>15</sup> See Lauri Karvonen, *The Personalisation of Politics* (ECPR, 2010) and Rod Rhodes, John Wanna and Patrick Weller, *Comparing Westminster* (Oxford, 2009), p.86-97 as examples of scholars who have questioned this view.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p.337, (emphasis in original).

<sup>17</sup> Mark Bennister, *Prime Ministers in Power: Political Leadership in Britain and Australia*, (Palgrave, 2012), p. 332.

Inevitably, across such an extended period, a variety of changes to the Australian executive has occurred. However, much of this has been conditional and based on the preferences of individual leaders rather than any structural alteration to the central institutions.<sup>18</sup> In particular, charges of centralised policy making have been levelled at all three leaders. When Whitlam, who led the FLP back to government after 23 years, took power the party had a clearly organised system to manage the governing process which involved a system of committees never seen before in Australia. As time went on and the government became more and more mired in controversy, this orderly system started to disintegrate. Ad hoc committees and leader interventionism became more prominent as Whitlam attempted to place himself at the centre of decision making, especially on economic affairs, much to the chagrin of his colleagues who often vehemently opposed his approach and policies. This went so far that Whitlam would decide who would be on each committee and he would announce policies with little or no consultation and this included over major foreign policy issues.<sup>19</sup> The extent of this discontent led Kim Beazley Snr to argue that “we (the FLP) were reaching Government by tantrums”.<sup>20</sup> Whitlam’s approach, which became known as the ‘crash or crash through’ model however had very little to do with any structural changes. The disintegration of the system and interventionism of the leader, were a product of Whitlam’s characteristics as an individual. Although, the use of the committee system as a tool to centralise decision making set a precedent for what was to follow in later governments.<sup>21</sup>

During the Hawke prime ministership, the FLP set out to not repeat the perceived mistakes of the Whitlam Government.<sup>22</sup> However, even Hawke, the great negotiator and consensus styled politician, made decisions without cabinet approval.<sup>23</sup> Despite pushes from backbenchers for greater consultation, Hawke argued that he “could not give a categorical statement that no decision would be taken without consultation with caucus committees”.<sup>24</sup> Steketee argued that two decisions “set the parameters for the relationship of caucus to the rest of the party”.<sup>25</sup> This included the splitting up of the cabinet as well as the decision to bind anyone in the inner and outer ministry who participated in decision making to these decisions in the caucus. These decisions while formally preserving the supremacy of caucus also weakened its authority as it meant that a small group of economic ministers could control the agenda of the government. This small group were part of the Expenditure Review Committee (ERC). According to Bramston, the ERC “was a key mechanism for bypassing the broader Cabinet in formulating budget policy”. In Blewett’s view, the ERC, soon after being formed

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<sup>18</sup> See Patrick Weller, ‘Prime Ministers and Cabinet’ in *Menzies to Keating: The development of the Australian Prime Ministership* (eds.) Patrick Weller, (Melbourne University Press, 1992), p.11-12.

<sup>19</sup> See Michael Sexton, who was a ministerial staffer (cited in Peter Walsh), *Confessions of a Failed Finance Minister*, (1979, Penguin Books), p.81; Bowen cited in Barry Cohen, *Life with Gough*, (Allen & Unwin, 1996), Kim Beazley Snr, *The Australian Labor Party and State Aid 1950-1980*, Education Research and Perspectives, Vol 12 (2) 1985, p.41-49. Tom Uren, Interviewed by Ron Hurst for the Parliament’s oral history project, 1992 for opposition to his approach. On a number of occasions Whitlam took part in high-level negotiations or announced policies without any consultation. See Beazley Snr, *The Australian Labor Party and State Aid*, (1985); Michael Salla, Australian foreign policy and East Timor, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol 49 (2), p.207-222. Jamie Mackie, Australia and Indonesia, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol 55 (1), p.133-143.

<sup>20</sup> Kim Beazley Snr was a minister in the Whitlam Government. See Beazley Snr, *The Australian Labor Party and State Aid*, (1985). It should be noted that Beazley Snr added that this wasn’t so in the first year but was increasingly so, after intense opposition from the Senate.

<sup>21</sup> Weller, ‘Prime Ministers and Cabinet’, p.12.

<sup>22</sup> David Day, ‘Hawke and the Labor Tradition’ in *The Hawke Government: A Critical Retrospective* (eds.) Susan Ryan and Troy Bramston (Pluto Press, 2003), p.403.

<sup>23</sup> The 1987 restructuring of the Cabinet and creation of mega-departments, the holding of the Combe-Ivanov inquiry, the length of the 1984 election campaign, and the MX commitment to the US for instance are all examples of this, Patrick Weller, ‘The Cabinet’ in *Hawke and Australian public policy: consensus and restructuring*, (eds.) Christine Jennett and Randall Stewart, (MacMillan, 1990), p.24-25.

<sup>24</sup> Mike Steketee, ‘Labor in Power: 1983-96’, in *True Believers, The Story of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party*, (eds.) John Faulkner and Stuart Macintyre (Allen and Unwin, 2001), p.143.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 140.

“monopolised all economic policy formulation, vetted all expenditure, and designed the budget...and thus the policy debates were fought out in the ERC”.<sup>26</sup> There were differences between those within the ERC on specific decisions such as the consumption tax debate in 1985. But the ERC became the “inner inner cabinet...and ERC decisions were de facto cabinet decisions”.<sup>27</sup> As a result, the will of the cabinet, and as a by-product, the will of the leadership, could be forced on caucus. The situation was best summated when “Science Minister Barry Jones asked Communications Minister Michael Duffy on one occasion after an economic policy announcement following a meeting of the full ministry: How did that happen? It’s purely a matter of numbers, Duffy replied, there’s four of them and only 23 of us”.<sup>28</sup> This centralisation of decision making was merely a continuation of what began to emerge during the Whitlam Government as the sovereignty of caucus as a decision making body was eroded, with the notable exception of leadership ballots.<sup>29</sup>

Throughout Kevin Rudd’s time as prime minister, the way that cabinet interacted with decisions of the Strategic Priorities and Budget Committee (SPBC) was frequently the source of speculation. According to journalist David Marr, cabinet ministers were allowed to look at a folder which contained the decisions of the committee, but the folder was not allowed to be taken out of the room.<sup>30</sup> There were also reports that Rudd and the other members of the SPBC - Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard, Finance Minister Lindsay Tanner and Treasurer Wayne Swan were marginalising cabinet;<sup>31</sup> that cabinet submissions were only being circulated the day before meetings; and that the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) was becoming the choke point for all decisions of the government.<sup>32</sup> According to most reports, the SPBC and Rudd were deciding on government policy and cabinet was becoming nothing more than a rubber-stamp.<sup>33</sup> Hence, Rudd similar to his prime ministerial predecessors, attempted to centralise decision making. Although, once again this is conditional and based on the type of leader and the nature of the FLP at that time rather than structural changes to the system. While committees and informal groupings are playing a bigger role and do add to a centralising phenomenon, structural changes to the system are hard to identify. However, a further indicator that Poguntke and Webb touch on when discussing the executive face is that of “the growth of resources at the disposal of the chief executive”.<sup>34</sup>

## Growth in Resources

The Whitlam leadership period is viewed in Australian terms as the watershed for increasing staff numbers around the prime minister. During his prime ministership, Whitlam had 21 staff

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<sup>26</sup> Neal Blewett was a minister in the Hawke and Keating Governments. See Troy Bramston, ‘The Hawke Leadership Model’, in *The Hawke Government: A Critical Retrospective* (eds.) Susan Ryan and Troy Bramston (Pluto Press, 2003), p.67-68 and Neal Blewett, ‘The Hawke Cabinets’ in *The Hawke Government: A Critical Retrospective* (eds.) Susan Ryan and Troy Bramston (Pluto Press, 2003), p.78.

<sup>27</sup> Blewett, ‘The Hawke Cabinets’, p.86.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141-2.

<sup>29</sup> Occasionally the caucus achieved victories such as over the MX missiles but this was very rare. See Steketee, ‘Labor in Power’, p.144.

<sup>30</sup> David Marr, ‘Power trip: the political journey of Kevin Rudd’, *Quarterly Essay* 38, (Black Inc, 2010).

<sup>31</sup> Paul Kelly, ‘It’s Not Rudd’s Strength but His Weakness That Matters’. *The Australian*, 14-15 November, p.1; Lenore Taylor and David Uren, ‘Shitstorm: Inside Labour’s Darkest Days’, (Melbourne University Press, 2010), p.83.

<sup>32</sup> Marr, ‘Power trip’, p. 68; Nicholas Stuart, ‘Rudd’s Way’, (Scribe Publications, 2010), p.167-8; Cameron Stewart, ‘Commander in Chief’, *The Australian*, 7-8 Nov, 2009, p. 16.

<sup>33</sup> Stewart, ‘Commander in Chief’, p.14; Michelle Grattan, ‘Who is the Real Kevin Rudd’, *The Age*, 6 March, 2010, p.1; Lenore Taylor, ‘The Rudd Government: What Has Gone Wrong’. 26 May 2010. La Trobe University. Available from:

<<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/news/ideas-and-society/the-rudd-government-what-has-gone-wrong>>. Accessed 15 February 2012.

<sup>34</sup> Poguntke and Webb, ‘The Presidentialization of Politics’, p.19.

working for him in the PMO.<sup>35</sup> Since this time, staffing numbers in the PMO have incrementally increased, sometimes even in direct contrast with staffing levels of other actors in the executive.<sup>36</sup> During the Hawke period, the numbers ranged from 16 in 1983 to 24 by 1990, which compared quite reasonably with the Whitlam period.<sup>37</sup> However, it was clear that the type of staff member was more specialised than previously and this coincided with the organisational wing becoming increasingly professionalised as well.<sup>38</sup> Hawke's PMO staff became so influential that it led the Treasurer and future prime minister, Paul Keating, to describe Hawke's office as a "Manchu court" and backbenchers would refer to Hawke's staffers as 'de-facto ministers'.<sup>39</sup> During the Rudd period, Stuart argues that it was Rudd's desire to micro-manage everything that led to a "massive expansion of the prime minister's department".<sup>40</sup> In 2007, Rudd and the FLP had promised to cut ministerial staffing numbers by around 30 per cent, however, the size of staff in the Prime Minister's Office rose dramatically. During the Rudd period, this number jumped up to 41 as of February 2008 and peaked at 50 in May 2010.<sup>41</sup> These staffers were also playing a critical role in shaping government policy in a wide range of key policy issues including the Global Financial Crisis and climate change.<sup>42</sup> In examining the increases during the 1980s, Walter argued that the increases were "serving as another mechanism to assure prime ministerial pre-eminence".<sup>43</sup> More than two decades on this assessment would be difficult to question as the increasing numbers and influence of advisers is playing a role in the ability of leaders to govern past parties, rather than through them.<sup>44</sup>

## The Party Face

When examining the party face, it is important to remember that while inter-connected with the examination of the executive face, that Poguntke and Webb noted that they were looking for "evidence of party rule changes which give leaders more formal power, the growth of the leaders' offices in terms of staff or resources...a shift in intra-party power to the benefit of the leader".<sup>45</sup> While Whitlam's legacy as a prime minister may be rejected by his contemporaries, his role in changing the organisational wing of the FLP, namely the conference and the executive are certainly not.<sup>46</sup> In fact, it could be argued that Whitlam's leadership was the first of many in which the leadership became increasingly presidentialized and was the tipping point, between two different parties. When Whitlam took the leadership in 1967, the party had already been out of power for 18 years and he viewed modernisation as essential.<sup>47</sup> While

<sup>35</sup> Ian Holland, 'Accountability of Ministerial Staff', Information and Research Services, Department of the Parliamentary Library. Available from: < <http://apo.org.au/?q=node/9221> >. Accessed 10 May 2011; Kate Jones, 'One Step at a Time: Australian Parliamentarians, Professionalism and the Need for Staff', *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol 59 (4), p.642-643; Anne Tiernan, 'Power without responsibility: ministerial staffers in Australian governments from Whitlam to Howard', (UNSW Press, 2007).

<sup>36</sup> Holland, 'Accountability'.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Bramston, 'The Hawke Leadership Model', p.54.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 54.

<sup>40</sup> Stuart, 'Rudd's Way', p.167-8.

<sup>41</sup> Department of Finance and Deregulation, Government Personal Positions as at 1 February 2008 - 1 May 2010 *Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration*.

<sup>42</sup> See Uren and Taylor, 'Shitstorm', p.68 as one example during debates over the stimulus packages in response to the GFC.

<sup>43</sup> James Walter, 'Prime Ministers and their Staff', in Pat Weller (ed.), *Menzies to Keating: The Development of the Australian Prime Ministership*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1992, p. 54.

<sup>44</sup> Poguntke and Webb, 'The Presidentialization of Politics', p. 9.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 343.

<sup>46</sup> The National Conference (formerly known as the Federal Conference) is theoretically the chief decision making body of the federal parliamentary party. The National Executive (formerly known as the Federal Executive) is the chief administrative body of the federal party between National Conferences. See Julia Gillard, 'The First Annual Whitlam Oration at the Whitlam Institute', University of Western Sydney, 31 March 2011; Paul Keating cited in Ross McMullin, 'The Light on the Hill: The Australian Labor Party 1891-1991', (Oxford, 1991), p. 431.

<sup>47</sup> An example of this is a report Whitlam delivered in 1964 to the federal executive on the 1963 election loss. In it, Whitlam argued, "The conference is closed to the press. It is the smallest Labor Conference in the World. Its parliamentary component has dropped from 70

it may have just been the perception that the organisational wing had more power than the parliamentary leadership, Whitlam knew this would always be something that the FPLP's opponents would attempt to capitalise on.<sup>48</sup> At the 1967 Federal Conference, Whitlam and supporters of changes to the party secured an increase in the size of the Federal Executive (from 12 to 17) and an increase in the size of the party's Federal Conference (from 36 to 47).<sup>49</sup> These increases included full voting rights for the leaders of the federal parliamentary party, something they had previously not enjoyed.<sup>50</sup> While this was short of the intended goals of the modernisers, this nevertheless set the party on the path to greater reform and further empowerment of the parliamentary leadership in the extra-parliamentary institutions of the party. While the changes to the nature of the party that Whitlam championed were employed before he became prime minister, Hawke was the sitting prime minister for almost the entirety of his leadership. This made changes to the intra-party institutions harder to resist for many within the party who for so long had been starved of electoral success.<sup>51</sup>

When the FPLP lost the 1975 and 1977 elections, they conducted an inquiry into the changes in the Australian body politic.<sup>52</sup> They concluded that they had to change their approach due to the traditional social cleavages breaking down.<sup>53</sup> The push towards a more pragmatic policy outlook coincided with internal changes as well. This included the role that factions would play. Factions and factionalism have been a consistent thread within the FPLP since federation. For many though, it was from the Hawke leadership period that the modern, national factions developed, organising almost everyone within the caucus into one of the groupings.<sup>54</sup> The adoption of Proportional Representation (PR) to allocate caucus and cabinet numbers in 1981 further added to this increased discipline. These changes only served to further empower the leader. Specifically, Hawke used the 'Right' and the 'Centre-Left' factions to control the agenda of the party, which effectively shut the 'Left' out of many major decisions. The faith placed in Neo-liberal economic policies by both the Right and the Centre Left allowed the parliamentary leadership to re-write the platform of the party and ignore decisions of the conference. When divisive issues arose, such as privatisation, the mining of uranium or charging fees for tertiary education, the issues were quickly removed from the conference floor. They were then usually:

*sent to committees for further discussion, and resolution if necessary by a postal vote of delegates. By this, the machine had turned the conference into a parliament; rather than a congress, into a discussion arena rather than a decision making collective of delegates<sup>55</sup>*

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percent to 25 percent over the last fifty years...The public must become better acquainted and more impressed with the proceedings of Labor's supreme policy-making and organising bodies". Also, he argued that, "The party's deliberations and image will be impaired unless and until the Federal Parliamentarians play and are seen to play a full part in formulating and interpreting Federal policy". Gough Whitlam, 'Report to the Central Executive', (1964), p.2-3.

<sup>48</sup> 'Australian Political Chronicle, January-June 1963'. *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol 9 (2), p. 243.

<sup>49</sup> McMullin, *The Light on the Hill*, p.318.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> When Hawke came to power in 1983, the FPLP had governed for only three (1972-1975) of the previous 34 years.

<sup>52</sup> This included "shifts in social class identification, stimulated by occupational changes, educational expansion, increased social mobility and rises in expectations". Dean Jaensch, *The Hawke-Keating Hijack: the ALP in Transition*, (Allen and Unwin, 1989), p.159-160.

<sup>53</sup> The 1979 National Committee of Inquiry, Report and Recommendations to the National Executive noted: "It is our conclusion that the coming decade will be among the most momentous in Australian history" The report went on to cite the continued "malaise" in Western capitalism, the "structural faults in the Australian economy" and "the maturing of a social revolution in Australia" which included changes to educational standards, ageing population, declining population and a greater role for women as part of this transformation.

<sup>54</sup> Michelle Grattan, *Caucus and the Factions*, True believers: the story of the federal parliamentary Labor Party, (Allen and Unwin, 2001), p.250; Xandra Faulkner, *The spirit of accommodation: the influence of the ALP's national factions on Party Policy, 1996-2004*, (2006), p.59. Furthermore, Uren, *Interview*, p. 8 noted that it wasn't till 1982 that the national Left formalised and elected executives and Cockburn noted that by 1987, "94 percent of federal Labor MPs were in a faction".

<sup>55</sup> Jaensch, *The Hawke-Keating Hijack*, p. 167.

This focus on factional discipline, combined with Hawke's personal popularity allowed the parliamentary leadership to further disenfranchise the institutions of the party, under the guise of appealing to the new middle class of the Australian electorate.

In the period that Rudd was leader of the FLP, the most notable shift was in the way the leadership were intervening in pre-selections. At the 2007 National Conference, a resolution passed noting that as the election was only months away and to maximise the chances of success, the conference gives the National Executive "specific authority to pre-select candidates in the House of Representatives for the 2007 federal election".<sup>56</sup> The resolution also noted that this would only apply to 2007 federal pre-selections and that this process would be applied exclusively to New South Wales (NSW) or where "application is sought by the Administrative Committee of another State or Territory Branch, and only in those seats where the National Executive Committee has unanimously agreed upon a process to select a candidate".<sup>57</sup> In reality, the application of the policy was much wider than had been envisaged. The interjection of the National Executive meant that at least 10 seats in one Australian state alone had their candidates chosen by the National Executive.<sup>58</sup> The process continued for pre-selections for the 2010 poll as well and it was later discovered that the National Executive was not using any motion passed at the 2007 National Conference at all. In fact they were using the plenary powers under Section 7 (f) in the ALP Constitution. These powers, which had been used extremely rarely until 2007, were now being used extensively to decide candidates for pre-selection in a number of Australian states.<sup>59</sup> At the 2009 National Conference which was described as the most "carefully stage managed ALP Conference ever" and "pre-approved water torture", the domination of the parliamentary leadership was visible for all to see.<sup>60</sup> The Government appointed a four-man troubleshooting team, whose role to intervene when any of the 400 delegates strayed from the script and moved away from a program which had already been vetted by the Prime Minister's Office.<sup>61</sup>

Clearly, changes to the structure of the party was something Whitlam could not achieve on his own and could not be forced through via the strength of his personality or due to the position that he held. Whitlam undoubtedly was one of the central - and perhaps loudest - advocates for change within the party, but in reality he was an agent for change that many others also wanted to see happen. In the Hawke leadership period, dramatic changes were also evident. Factions became national and better organised, and the prime minister used the dominant alliance of the 'Right' and 'Centre-Left' factions to ensure much of his policy agenda was implemented in the caucus as well as at conference. Despite the objections of rank and file members, Hawke rejected conference resolutions and the platform which many

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<sup>56</sup> Australian Labor Party, National Platform 2007. Available from: <<http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22library%2Fparty%2F1024541%22>>. Accessed 3 May 2012.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Phillip Coorey and David Humphries, 'ALP Preselection Bloodletting Begins'. *Sydney Morning Herald*. 02 May 2007. Available from: <http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/alp-preselection-bloodletting-begins/2007/05/01/1177788142488.html>, accessed 14 February, 2012.

<sup>59</sup> 'An Imposing List', *Southern Highlands ALP Branch Newsletter* -no.159 – Holiday 2010; Melissa Maddison, 'Trio Vie for Dawson Preselection', ABC, 17 March 2010. Available from: <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/03/17/2848068.htm?site=northqld>>. Accessed 15 February 2012.

<sup>60</sup> Bernard Keane, 'Kevin 09: Competent, Unglamorous and Focussed on Outcomes'. Crikey, 30 July 2009. Available from: <http://www.crikey.com.au/2009/07/30/kevin-09-competent-unglamorous-focussed-on-outcomes/>. Accessed 10 February 2012; Andrew Crook, 'Alp Conference Turtles Pull Their Heads In'. Crikey, 31 July 2009. Available from: <http://www.crikey.com.au/2009/07/31/alp-conference-turtles-pull-their-heads-in/>. Accessed 10 February, 2012.

<sup>61</sup> Stewart, 'Commander', p.16; Annabel Crabb, 'Passion bypass as men in suits rule', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 July 2009. Available from: <<http://www.smh.com.au/national/passion-bypass-as-men-in-suits-rule-20090730-e337.html>>. Accessed 15 Feb 2012.



held dear, merely seeing these as a loose collection of ideals. During the Rudd leadership period, the changes that occurred, while less visually dramatic, accentuated the power of the parliamentary leadership even further. Rudd's leadership and his sudden fall from grace are almost uniquely consistent with what Poguntke and Webb described as the logic of presidentialization.<sup>62</sup> They argued: "It is likely that leaders who base their leadership on such contingent claims to a personalised mandate will seek to consolidate their leadership by enhancing their control of the party machinery, not least through appropriate statutory changes which give them more direct power over the party".<sup>63</sup> Almost prophetically they noted that "This may be a risky strategy in that it could provoke reactions by the party's middle-level strata. While they may have been prepared to accept leadership domination as long as it was contingent on (the promise of) electoral appeal, they are likely to resent the formalisation of such power".<sup>64</sup> In the end, Rudd, who Faulkner argued was as "dominant as any Labor leader we've seen since the birth of the modern Labor party under Whitlam", had solely electoral appeal to base his leadership upon.<sup>65</sup> To summarise, in the party face, during each of the leadership periods, intra-party power shifted further towards the parliamentary leadership than their predecessor.

## The Electoral Face

It is perhaps in the electoral face where the concept of presidentialization is most often discussed. Frequently, scholars comment on how leaders have dominated campaigns and become more presidential, or that during elections that prime ministers act presidential.<sup>66</sup> When examining the electoral face of presidentialization, three factors need to be examined. These are campaign style, media focus and voting behaviour. This section will examine campaign style and media focus and then examine leader impact on voting behaviour.

### Campaign Style and Media Focus

During Whitlam's period as leader, the type of campaign the FLP ran shifted dramatically, especially after 1972. This shift was not only in terms of the leader's role in the campaigns, but the techniques used. Fundamental to this evolution was television's emergence as the dominant political medium. According to Lloyd "more than any other factor, the conduct of the contemporary Australian prime ministership has been shaped by the impact of television".<sup>67</sup> But he could have placed a caveat at the end of this: this was from Gough Whitlam onwards. The campaign which demonstrated the changing nature of Australian politics more than any other during this period was in 1972. The FLP used focus groups, market research, a televised campaign launch and a variety of local celebrities to endorse

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<sup>62</sup> This was so pronounced that after considering his options, Rudd did not even enter the ballot the Caucus was holding for the leadership as his level of supporters was so few he knew he had no chance of victory. He immediately resigned and his deputy Julia Gillard became Prime Minister unopposed. This was the first time in Australian political history that a first-term Prime Minister was removed from office by their party.

<sup>63</sup> Poguntke and Webb, *The Presidentialization of Politics*, p. 9.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Stewart, *Commander in Chief*, p.17.

<sup>66</sup> See Patrick Weller and L Young, 'Political Parties and the Party System: Challenges for Effective Governing', in *Institutions on the Edge? Capacity for Governance*, (Allen and Unwin, 2000), p.163; Clem Lloyd, 'Prime Ministers and the Media' in *Menzies to Keating: The development of the Australian Prime Ministership*, (eds.) Patrick Weller, (Melbourne University Press, 1992), p.132.

<sup>67</sup> Lloyd, *Prime Ministers and the Media*, p. 109.

Whitlam and to appear in advertising.<sup>68</sup>The ambiguous nature of what was actually being referred to in the television commercials, which became known as the 'It's Time' advertising, was especially telling.<sup>69</sup>In Mills' view, "not a single policy is hinted at, not a single mention of Vietnam, not a single solid clue is given about the future of Australia...It's Time for what? No specific answer is given".<sup>70</sup> According to Paul Jones, the creator of the commercials, this was however, "the point".<sup>71</sup>Very little empirical data exists on media coverage during this period. However, what is known is that in spite of party official's best intentions, the media wanted to focus their intention almost exclusively on Whitlam. For instance, Combe noted that during the 1977 election: "Try as we might to gain blanket coverage for Hayden, Hawke or Dunstan, we were thwarted by the obvious policy of the networks to limit their coverage as far as possible to the leaders".<sup>72</sup>In the view of Lloyd, the coverage of that election (1977) and was very similar to the recent campaigns Whitlam had contested.<sup>73</sup>

During the early stages of the Hawke leadership period, such was his personal popularity, that the party focussed its campaign material and advertising squarely on Hawke the individual.<sup>74</sup> Summers, for instance, argued that the 1983 election was nothing more than a shallow promotion of Hawke.<sup>75</sup>For the three elections (1984, 1987 and 1990) that followed, the recipe remained almost the same. In McAllister's opinion, during the 1987 campaign "Labor's campaign strategy was to offer a minimum number of new policies, to rely on its record in government since 1983, and to feature Bob Hawke, its popular leader, as frequently and prominently as possible".<sup>76</sup>The personal appeal of Hawke was also apparent in the way the media reported on politics during this period. For instance, Buckley argued that Hawke had a special relationship with the Australian media:

*As an example of a pair of star crossed lovers it would be hard to beat Bob Hawke's relationship with the media...he owed much of his popularity to early favourable media portrayals...in his early days as a public figure the media could not get enough of him. Hawke's face was marvellously photogenic, his voice unmistakable. He was always accessible, always good copy, always at the heart of an interesting story in industrial or ALP politics. And this was no accident. Coming up through the trade union ranks, Hawke set out to deliberately court good publicity.<sup>77</sup>*

The federal election of 2007 was the only campaign Rudd contested as leader of the party. As the year began and with the FPLP leading in the polls, the party focussed on marketing Rudd by releasing two television ads. The first highlighted where Rudd came from and how he cared about education and the future. The second was an attempt to paint Rudd as

<sup>68</sup> Stephen Mills, 'The New Machine Men: Polls and Persuasion in Australian Politics', (Penguin, 1986); Robert Crawford, 'Modernising Menzies, Whitlam, and Australian elections', *Australian Review of Public Affairs*. Available from: <<http://apo.org.au/?q=node/8692>>. Accessed 10 Nov 2011; James Walter and Paul Strangio, 'No Prime Minister: Reclaiming Politics From Leaders'; (UNSW Press, 2007), p. 60.

<sup>69</sup> As Jones (2003: 103) noted, "[T]he famous ALP television advertisements featured well-known celebrities such as Little Pattie, Bobby Limb, Bert Newton and Jack Thompson, singing the 'It's Time' theme song. The advertisements varied from thirty seconds to two minutes, and there was a colour version made for theatres and drive-ins".

<sup>70</sup> Mills, 'The New Machine Men', p. 97.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. For more on the campaign strategy see Crawford, 2004: 148-151.

<sup>72</sup> Cited in Clem Lloyd, 'A Lean Campaign for the Media', in *The Australian National Elections of 1977*, (eds.) H.R Penniman, (American Institute for Public Policy Research, 1979), p.263. Bill Hayden was a minister in the Whitlam Government, including the Treasurer in 1975 and became leader of the party after Whitlam stepped down. Don Dunstan was a popular Premier from the state of South Australia who served in that position twice (1967-1968 and 1970-1979).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p.261-3. David Combe was the National Secretary of the party during this period.

<sup>74</sup> Paul Kelly, 'The Hawke ascendancy: a definitive account of its origins and climax, 1975-1983', (Angus & Robertson, 1984), p. 396; Gwyneth Singleton, 'The accord and the Australian labour movement', (Melbourne University Press, 1990), p. 151.

<sup>75</sup> Anne Summers, 'Gamble for power: how Bob Hawke beat Malcolm Fraser: the 1983 federal election', (Nelson, 1983), p. 186.

<sup>76</sup> Ian McAllister, 'Australia: 11 July, Consolidating the Hawke Ascendancy', *Government and Opposition*, Vol 23 (1), p. 438.

<sup>77</sup> Amanda Buckley, 'Hawke and the Australian People', in *The Hawke Government: A Critical Retrospective*, ed. Susan Ryan and Troy Bramston, (North Melbourne, 2003), p. 31.

economically disciplined.<sup>78</sup> Later in the year, the ALP launched its 'Kevin07' marketing blitz with t-shirts, websites and blogging from Rudd in the form of his 'KMAIL'.<sup>79</sup> The approach, which was meant to tie into the 'New Leadership' theme, focussed on attracting young voters and Rudd's appearances on FM radio and youth television programs, as well as the use of *YouTube*, *MySpace* and *Facebook* were meant to provide clear contrasts with the government and in particular the ageing Prime Minister, John Howard.<sup>80</sup> The FLP avoided spending money on advertising in the broadsheet or tabloid newspapers and instead focussed their attention on skywriting and text messaging.<sup>81</sup> This deeply personalised campaign seemed to provide little chance for other actors to receive much exposure and Goot's comparison of the campaign coverage of candidates proved this.<sup>82</sup>

## Voting Behaviour

While data demonstrating leader effects on voting behaviour was still relatively limited, it was clear that the FLP responded to a perceived negative impact Whitlam was having in some of the elections that he contested as leader. In particular, as time went on they tried to focus on other members of the broader labour movement such as Bill Hayden and Bob Hawke. In contrast, it is clear that Hawke did have a positive impact on voting behaviour during the four elections that he contested. However, the level of this impact is debatable. Hawke led all of his opponents in preferred PM or leader performance questions conducted in the various polls during the election campaigns. This by its very nature would have to translate into some advantage and Bean and Kelley showed through their analysis of the 1987 election that Hawke was responsible for a swing towards the ALP of 1.4 per cent.<sup>83</sup> When it comes to voting behaviour in the 2007 election, it appears that the 'Rudd factor' was substantially overstated initially.<sup>84</sup> A number of studies released since have shown that leadership was not one of the key factors in the 2007 election result.<sup>85</sup> The evidence suggests that it was policies rather than Rudd's leadership that were central to the victory. Although Rudd's leadership provided enough stability that concerns previously held about the FLP were minimised enough so that voters could shift without fearing any radical departure from the status quo. These results add further weight to McAllister's argument that during elections, leaders clearly matter but usually much less than is often supposed.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Peter Hartcher, *To the bitter end: the dramatic story of the fall of John Howard and the rise of Kevin Rudd*, (Allen & Unwin, 2009), p. 175; Stuart, *Rudd's Way*, p.34.

<sup>79</sup> Christine Jackman, *Inside Kevin07: The People, The Plan, The Prize*, (Melbourne University Press, 2008), p. 159.

<sup>80</sup> Peter van Onselen and Phillip Senior, *Howard's end: the unravelling of a government*, (Melbourne University Press, 2008), p. 172-3; George Megalogenis, *The Longest Decade*, (Scribe, 2008), p. 326-330; Edgar Crook, *The 2007 Australian Federal Election on the Internet*, National Library of Australia, Staff Paper. Available from:

<http://www.nla.gov.au/openpublish/index.php/nlasp/article/view/1040/1308>. Accessed 10 Nov 2011. Rachel Gibson and Ian McAllister, 'Do Online Election Campaigns Win Votes? The 2007 Australian "YouTube" Election', *Political Communication*, Vol 28 (2).

<sup>81</sup> Jackman, *Inside Kevin07*, p. 193.

<sup>82</sup> Murray Goot, 'Is the News on the Internet Different? Leaders, Frontbenchers and Other Candidates in the 2007 Australian Election', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 43, no. 1, (March, 2008) p. 99-110.

<sup>83</sup> Clive Bean and Johnathon Kelly, 'Partisan stability and short-term change in the 1987 federal election: Evidence from the NSSS panel survey', *Politics*, Vol 23 (2), p.91.

<sup>84</sup> See Paul Williams, 'The 2007 Australian Federal Election: The Story of Labor's Return from the Electoral Wilderness' *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol 54 (1), p. 123 as an example of this.

<sup>85</sup> Hartcher, *To The Bitter End*, p. 148; Megalogenis, *The Longest Decade*, p. 340; Peter Browne and Ian Watson, 'The 2007 Federal Election: Exit Poll Analysis', Report prepared for *Australian Policy Online*, September 2008, p. 5.

<sup>86</sup> Ian McAllister, 'The Personalization of Politics', *Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*, (Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 3.

## Conclusion

When one examines the leadership periods through the lens of the presidentialization thesis as conceptualised by Poguntke and Webb, some clear trends emerge.<sup>87</sup> Some of these add weight to the thesis; others raise questions about its current conceptual parameters.<sup>88</sup> In the executive face, there is evidence of increasing resources in the form of the number and type of advisers, and some evidence of centralisation due to the increasingly important role committees and other ad hoc arrangements are playing. However, compared with other cases, Australia may exhibit less of a trend towards presidentialization due to the institutional advantages Australian prime ministers have possessed for decades. In the party face, the domination of the elites over not only their parliamentary colleagues but the extra-parliamentary institutions increased from the Whitlam period to the Rudd period. Each period further alienated the rank and file members and enhanced the autonomy and resources that the parliamentary leadership enjoyed. In a party with such prescriptive institutions as the FPLP, this has often transpired despite specific rules, resolutions and policies being in place to prevent such behaviour. In the electoral face, the campaigns the party ran and the focus of the media were increasingly personalised adding to the messiah complex that leaders of Australia's political parties endure. With the death of ideology based politics and little difference in terms of policy between the major parties, leaders now walk a veritable tightrope where they are more powerful when they are polling well and more vulnerable when they are not than in the past.<sup>89</sup> While the impact leaders are having on voting behaviour appears quite small, Poguntke et al's argument that the direct impact of leaders may be "further back in the funnel of causality" then can be measured, appears plausible.<sup>90</sup>

In spite of the various assaults on the merits of the presidentialization thesis over the years, the thesis and specifically the Poguntke and Webb model, provides something no other framework does. This is the ability to examine changes that have structurally enhanced the capacities of leaders in their governments, in their parties and during election campaigns. Critics often ignore that the Poguntke and Webb model is a model of comparative politics; meaning it is designed to examine whether national idiosyncrasies are producing democratic leaders more or less powerful than their international counterparts. The Australian case highlights this point better than most. Australia has a distinctive institutional architecture which provides extensive advantages for the leaders of Australia's major political parties. But in the end, these leaders are party leaders first and foremost, and to paraphrase Jaensch, the parties remain the key to understanding the Australian polity.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Poguntke and Webb, 'The Presidentialization of Politics'.

<sup>88</sup> Paul Webb, Thomas Poguntke and Robyn Kolodny, 'The Presidentialization of Party Leadership? Evaluating Party Leadership and Party Government in the Democratic World', Available from: <<http://ssrn.com/abstract=1915657>>. Accessed 4 Dec 2011.

<sup>89</sup> Walter and Strangio, 'No Prime Minister', p. 57.

<sup>90</sup> Poguntke, Webb and Kolodny, 'The Presidentialization of Party Leadership', p.27.

<sup>91</sup> Dean Jaensch, 'Party Structures and Processes', in *Political Parties in Transition* (eds.) Ian Marsh, (Federation Press, 2006), p. 24.