



## SUMMER SCHOLAR'S PAPER

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# 'In the wilderness': preparation for government by the Coalition in opposition 1983–1993<sup>1</sup>

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### Executive summary

- This paper examines the Coalition's policy and preparation efforts to transition into government between 1983 and 1993.
- The role of the opposition in the Australian political system is examined and briefly compared with other Westminster countries. The paper also outlines the workings of the shadow Cabinet and the nature of the working relationship between the Liberal Party (LP) and The Nationals (NATS) as a Coalition.
- Next, the paper provides a brief historical background of the Coalition's history in power from 1949 to 1983, and the broader political context in Australia during those years.
- Through an examination of key policy documents between 1983 and 1993, the paper argues that different approaches to planning emerged over the decade. First a diagnostic phase from 1983–1984 under the leadership of Andrew Peacock. Second, a policy development phase from 1985–1990 under the leadership of both Peacock and John Howard. The third period from 1990–1993 under Dr John Hewson was unique. Hewson's Opposition engaged in a rigorous and sophisticated regime of policy making and planning never attempted before or since by an Australian opposition. The LP's attempts to plan for government resulted in the institutionalisation of opposition policy making within the LP and the Coalition.
- Each leader's personal leadership style played an important role in determining the processes underpinning the Coalition's planning efforts in addition to the overall philosophical approach of the Liberal-led Coalition.
- Previous claims that the Coalition parties do not engage in sustained planning do not fully appreciate attempts at planning between 1983 and 1993. The LP did engage in policy and transition planning, especially from 1990 to 1993, although the different political goals of, and cultures within, the ALP and the LP resulted in different approaches to planning and policy making.

This research paper has been produced by a student participating in the Parliamentary Library's Summer Scholarship Program. The views expressed do not reflect an official position of the Parliamentary Library.

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1. R Menzies, *The measure of the years*, Cassell Australia, North Melbourne: Vic., 1970, p. 17.

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## Introduction

Inglorious and bereft of power and influence, oppositions do not receive sufficient attention from political scientists. Indeed, with the notable exception of Riddell and Haddon and Walter, academics have failed to give due consideration to the important work done by oppositions as they prepare for government and the impact this has on their ability to perform in the early days after an election victory.<sup>2</sup> There have only been seven changes of government at the federal level in Australia since the Second World War, making transitions of government an important moment in Australian politics. Newly elected governments come to power with high levels of authority and political capital, which can be deployed to see their alternative vision and policy agenda enacted. Yet, in an era dominated by 'small-target politics', which has seen opposition parties keep much of their alternative policy agenda under wraps, and when new governments have struggled with the transition from opposition to government, the question of what efforts parties make to plan for government is more important than ever. What lessons can we learn from parties' previous experiences and what can we learn about the development of thinking and processes within the parties themselves?

Through an examination of Coalition policy papers and internal documents located at the National Archives of Australia in the Hon. James Joseph Carlton AO and the Hon. Frederick Michael Chaney AO collections, this paper explores the approach of Liberal Party (LP) and The Nationals (NATS) in coalition to planning for a transition to government between 1983 and 1993 (for details of Coalition members discussed in the paper see Appendix1). These materials are supplemented with interviews undertaken at the Parliamentary Library and interviews undertaken for my PhD Research with current and former members of the LP and NATS. This paper also makes use of the Parliamentary Library's extensive political document, press clipping and press release collections.

The study aims to uncover what processes took place, what rationale and assumptions underpinned Coalition preparations for government and what this reveals about the Coalition's political culture and its approach to opposition. First, the paper surveys the role of the opposition in Australia's political system. It then explores the debate about how much preparation the opposition should undertake and the different approaches to opposition. Third, the paper examines the internal processes used by the Coalition to formulate plans for government, particularly by the LP, and how Coalition thinking evolved over the decade. Last, the paper explores the role of personal leadership style on the Coalition's approach to planning.

## The opposition in Australia's parliamentary system

The work of oppositions, their specific duties and responsibilities, is both a reflection of, and is shaped by, formal political structures and institutions as well as historical precedent and contemporary political culture. The opposition performs both specific and symbolic roles in Australian politics. Writing about Westminster, British academic Jennings put it best when declaring that the opposition is tomorrow's government and it is this assumption which drives opposition behaviour and practice.<sup>3</sup> However, the opposition also plays a significant role in Australia's democratic structures. As eminent American political scientist Robert Dahl argues, the existence of an opposition is 'very nearly the most distinctive characteristic of democracy itself'.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, as academic Kevin Tuffin proposes, the existence of an opposition assumes some level of functioning civil society.<sup>5</sup>

In Australia, the role and practice of opposition has drawn heavily on the Westminster tradition, but it was also innovative in granting privileges and rights, such as salaries for MPs and resources for the opposition executive, which allowed the opposition to improve the execution of their functions.<sup>6</sup> Given that our two-party system is weighted towards the government, regular alternation between parties refreshes government and revitalises our democratic foundations.

## Roles of the opposition

First let us consider the formal roles of the opposition as outlined in *House of Representatives Practice*:

2. See P Riddell and C Haddon, [Transitions: preparing for changes of government](#), Institute for Government, 2009, accessed 13 September 2013; J Walter, 'Managers or messiahs? Prime ministerial leadership and the transition to government', in, P T Hart and J Uhr, eds, *How power changes hands: transition and succession in government*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndsmill, 2011.
3. WJ Jennings, *The British Constitution*, fifth edn, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1966, p. 30.
4. R Dahl, *Political opposition in western democracies*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1966, p. xvi.
5. K Tuffin, 'Opposition', in B Galligan and W Roberts, eds, *The Oxford companion to Australian politics*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2007, p. 377.
6. G Maddox, *Australian democracy in theory and practice*, fifth edn, Pearson, Melbourne, 2005, p. 237.

- unmaking the Government—the opposition, by definition, seeks to defeat a government or cause a government to resign<sup>7</sup>
- scrutiny of, criticism of, and suggestion of improvements to, legislation and financial proposals
- examination of expenditure and public accounts
- seeking information on and clarification of government policy (principally questions with and without notice)
- surveillance, appraisal and criticism of government administration
- bringing grievances to public attention, including by petitioning, and
- examining delegated legislation.<sup>8</sup>

The above are largely procedural roles, which can be grouped into three broad political roles:

- First, the opposition acts as an alternative government. In theory, the opposition can replace the government at any time should the government lose the confidence of the majority of members in the lower house (House of Representatives). However, the reality of modern party discipline means that the opposition is unlikely to replace the government except through an election. At election times, the opposition presents itself as the alternative government. This entails providing alternative leadership (alternative prime minister and the shadow Cabinet), but also serves to frame debate and educate the public about policy alternatives. This grants citizens meaningful choices at an election.
- Second, the opposition acts as a source of alternative representation. The opposition, in its role representing the largest minority party or grouping in the Australian Parliament, is the titular source of minority representation. One of its key functions is to act as a conduit for discussion, to air grievances and to grant a degree of legitimacy to the complaints of minorities.
- Last, the opposition performs oversight functions, acting as chief scrutineer of the executive. Using the considerable powers of the legislature, the opposition carries out oversight of the administration of government programs and finances. An opposition that can effectively expose poor government practices is in a stronger position to argue for a change of government.

### **A role fraught with tension**

As *House of Representatives Practice* notes most, if not all, of the opposition's scrutineering roles are in fact the role of the legislature.<sup>9</sup> However, the rise of the two party system and strong party discipline in Australian politics has meant that, in the House of Representatives, the traditional role of the legislature to scrutinise the actions of the executive is effectively abandoned to the opposition. Today, government backbenchers in the House rarely seek to use the formal powers of the legislature to scrutinise the executive. Academics often opine that the opposition should play a constructive role in the assessment of legislation, acting almost as a handmaiden in the service of the public good, although this fails to acknowledge that the interests of the opposition and the public are not the same.

Instead, much of the energy and resources of the opposition are devoted to challenging, with the aim of replacing, the government. Although oppositions often like to invoke the high-minded principles of holding the government to account, their prime motivation is to convince voters to replace the incumbent administration. The aim of political parties in opposition is to win power, not assist the incumbents to govern better. Nevertheless, the opposition must constantly weigh its duty to the public good with its own ambitions.

### **Capacity of the opposition: The House of Representatives versus the Senate**

The opposition is given limited resources with which to both craft an alternative set of policies and to scrutinise the government.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, there is a significant imbalance in the powers of opposition members depending

7. Theoretically, an opposition could achieve this end by persuading a majority of MPs to accept its viewpoint. In reality, the opposition seeks the defeat of the government at a general election through a campaign of public persuasion.

8. IC Harris, ed., *House of Representatives practice*, fifth edn, Department of the House of Representatives, Canberra, 2005, pp. 78–79, accessed 25 March 2014.

9. Harris, ed., *House of Representatives practice*, op. cit., p. 79.

10. A political party in Opposition has significantly fewer resources than a political party in government. Oppositions do not have access to the bureaucracy as a source of advice, expertise and the most up to date figures about the economy or Australian society. This is most obviously demonstrated by the numbers of staff available to the Opposition, which are considerably lower. Today, by bi-partisan agreement the Opposition receives around 21 per cent of the Government's staffing allocation,

on the chamber in which they sit. Opposition members of the House of Representatives have few formal powers and little capacity to influence government.<sup>11</sup> Their only means of exercising power is to seek information, embarrass and forestall government. As demonstrated by the Coalition Opposition during the 43rd parliament, this power is considerably enhanced in a hung parliament with a minority government. Given the weight of numbers on the government side in a majority parliament, reinforced by strong party discipline, the opposition is usually unable to force change upon the government in this chamber. Indeed, as Kaiser notes, Australia's opposition has weak powers and capacity in the lower house.<sup>12</sup>

However, the position is reversed in the Senate. Indeed, it is one of the world's most powerful upper chambers.<sup>13</sup> The decline of government majorities in the upper house and the development of a robust committee system have seen the Senate's powers effectively realised. As well, the rise of minor parties and independents has further changed the political culture of the Senate, granting more opportunities for negotiation. In a situation in which neither major party is in control of the upper house, there is a multiplicity of interests with which the government must deal in order to build a majority for particular legislation. Opposition Senators are not only able to demand, and sometimes compel, information from the government; they are also able to obstruct government initiatives, forcing governments into deals in order to secure the passage of their legislation.

### ***Debates around what the opposition should do***

Menzies noted that opposition was 'a great constructive period in the life of a party; properly considered, not a period in the wilderness, but a period of preparation for the high responsibilities which you hope will come'.<sup>14</sup> However, his advice for oppositions was to be as different from the government as possible, rather than to engage in detailed planning.<sup>15</sup> Academics such as Scott Prasser have questioned whether oppositions should even prepare for government given that their strategic disadvantage in resources limits their capacity to offer voters much detail.<sup>16</sup> Yet, Prasser ultimately concluded that oppositions could not just rely on criticism of the government but needed—and were expected—to develop policy.<sup>17</sup>

Walter argues more ambiguously that planning is important, but it must work in combination with the right personal and political qualities in the party leader.<sup>18</sup> In short, planning is a worthy goal and certainly helps, but ultimately it is the leadership qualities of party leaders that are crucial to winning government and governing well. Additionally, Walter argues that the Coalition places less emphasis on planning when compared to the ALP, choosing instead to rely on broad principles and its self-belief as the natural party of government.<sup>19</sup> However, this view discounts the Coalition's planning efforts undertaken during 1983 to 1990, and particularly from 1990 to 1993. Walter also stresses the party's reliance on principles over planning and policy substance. As this paper will demonstrate, a dependence on statements of broad principle is certainly a hallmark of the LP, but it does not characterise the party at all times. Moreover, the LP's political philosophy which broadly (and simplistically) preferences individual self-reliance and privately lead economic activity over and redistribution of wealth and state initiated economic activity naturally produces different goals for government from the ALP. That is, the LPA and the ALP's end goals, or vision, for what kind of country Australia should be are different and therefore each political party will ask different kinds of questions about how to shape Australia. As the assumptions

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see A Tiernan, *Power Without Responsibility: ministerial staffers in Australian governments from Whitlam to Howard*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2007, p. 30; For more details on the difference between parliamentary allowances and entitlements see: C Madden and D McKeown, *Parliamentary remuneration and entitlements*, Research paper, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 29 July 2013.

11. A Kaiser, 'Parliamentary opposition in Westminster democracies: Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 14(1), 2011, p. 23.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

14. Menzies, *The measure of the years*, p. 17.

15. *Ibid.*, pp.18, 20.

16. S Prasser, 'Opposition one day, government the next: can oppositions make policy and be ready for office?', *Australasian Parliamentary Review*, 25(1), 2010, pp. 154–158.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

18. Walter, 'Managers or messiahs', *op. cit.*, pp. 51, 53.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 50; The Coalition's twenty-three year dominance of the government benches during Australia's post-war years led commentators and academics to refer to the Coalition as the 'natural party of government' due to their dominant position in Australia's political system at the federal level.

underpinning the ALP and the LP's thinking are different, it logically follows that they will also engage in different kinds of planning processes that reflect their differing philosophical and policy beliefs.

There are only a handful of studies on opposition preparation for government in Westminster jurisdictions.<sup>20</sup> In general, British political scientists give more credence to the importance of planning, compared with Australian scholars who view it as a helpful but not crucial addition to the opposition's campaign to win government.<sup>21</sup> Haddon argues that policy-making in preparation for government serves a number of purposes. First, it serves as a means of forcing oppositions to think clearly and coherently about their goals and priorities and to answer the question, 'what do we want to achieve in government?'<sup>22</sup> This process is, at the very least, a way of signalling their agenda to voters. Second, policymaking in opposition also has the potential to become an enriching process for the opposition—one which can assist in the transition to government and the build-up of expertise within a political party.<sup>23</sup> Third, effective planning promotes coherence in the message of the opposition, ensuring consistency of its policy offerings.<sup>24</sup> Instead of simply relying on voter dissatisfaction with the government, rigorous planning and credible policy development can lay the foundations for a successful transition to power and effective governance.

Preparation for government is simultaneously a process of planning to win an election and transitioning successfully into a well-functioning government. While these two processes are linked, they are not the same. As noted above, preparation for government assists an opposition to stake out a position and to refine its message. This is largely about deciding the parameters of a future government: its priorities, goals, values and ideology that will underpin its agenda. While related, these are not the same as machinery of government questions and thinking about how a political party will manage and balance the power of executive government with the political culture and constraints of a political party. The relative importance of these two different sets of questions depends on the political culture in which parties operate, in addition to structural issues such as the length of parliamentary terms. For example, in the United Kingdom (UK), longer parliamentary terms, fewer independent political staff and a political culture that places a greater expectation on parties to produce manifestos all encourage parties to invest more time and effort into planning for government. In Australia, shorter election cycles and the ability of parties to get elected on the basis of broad statements of values, have meant that parties have placed a lesser premium on detailed planning for government compared with the UK.

### ***Work of the shadow Cabinet***

In the Westminster system the shadow Cabinet is a deliberative body of the opposition's executive. The practice of the shadow Cabinet has evolved over the centuries in British politics and slowly became institutionalised.<sup>25</sup> As Bateman notes, it is an important organising and training body that also epitomises the idea of an alternative government.<sup>26</sup> The shadow Cabinet determines its own work patterns and load and, unlike the Cabinet, the shadow Cabinet is shaped by its members and is accountable only to its party room. However, as its name suggests, much of its work mimics the work of Cabinet: submissions are presented to shadow Cabinet for collective appraisal and decision-making and it is an opportunity for the executive of the party to take stock of the political landscape. However, there are two major exceptions: first, the bulk of the work of shadow Cabinet is focused on determining the opposition's response to government legislation. Much of the briefing work provided to the shadow Cabinet relates to deciding the opposition's approach to government legislation. Second, shadow Cabinet is run by either the party organisation (as it was from 1983–93) or the LP leader's office (as in recent periods in opposition). Increasing centralisation of resources (notably advisory staff) and decision-making in the leader's office has gone hand-in-hand with a growing focus on leaders in Australia politics.

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20. See Walter, 'Managers or messiahs', op. cit.; P Weller, 'Transition: taking over power in 1983', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 42(3), 1983, pp. 303–19.

21. Ibid.

22. C Haddon, '[Making policy in opposition: lessons for effective government](#)', Institute for Government, 2012, pp. 2–3, accessed 18 October 2013.

23. Ibid., p. 6.

24. Ibid., p. 4.

25. For evolution of the shadow Cabinet see RM Punnett, *Front-Bench opposition: the role of the leader of the opposition, the shadow Cabinet and shadow government in British politics*, Heinemann Educational Books, London, 1973, Chapter 2.

26. J Bateman, '[In the shadows: the shadow cabinet in Australia](#)', Research Paper, Parliamentary Library, Canberra, May 2009, pp. 11–25.

## ***The different approaches of the major parties***

Differences in political culture within the Coalition and the ALP naturally result in differences in approach to preparation and planning for government.

### **ALP**

Historically, the ALP has had a broader commitment to planning and collective processes given the (historical) importance of the party platform and the caucus because of its large and important extra-parliamentary party dimensions. The existence of 'the pledge', where Labor MPs promise to vote as a bloc on threat of expulsion, and the inability for the parliamentary Labor party to unilaterally make changes to the party's policy platform are important institutional factors that have shaped the ALP's political culture.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, as Walter argues, the ALP is more likely to invest in a specific committee process to produce a planning document, which is then more likely to be released to the public prior to the election.<sup>28</sup> By contrast, the Coalition is not a 'delegate party' like the ALP but more of a vehicle of the leadership group and for this reason is more likely to produce a planning document internally from the leader's office. Unlike the ALP, the LP's party organisation grants the parliamentary party with the authority to make policy decisions on the proviso that the Liberal MPs and Senators remain broadly consistent with the LP's political values.<sup>29</sup> The ALP's emphasis — which was stronger during the time period studied in this paper — on the caucus and the team is a key difference. For example, in his autobiography, former ALP leader Bill Hayden reflected that during his tenure as Opposition Leader, the policy process was a team-based activity.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, Hayden also blurred the lines between policy preparation and machinery of government issues reflecting that the two are vitally linked.<sup>31</sup> Consider, for example, Labor leader Gough Whitlam's emphasis on the ALP's Platform during his time in government and the ALP's desire to learn from the mistakes of the Whitlam Government with their work on *Labor and Quality of Government* in 1982–83.<sup>32</sup>

### **Coalition: working with the Nationals<sup>33</sup>**

Although the LP and the NATS have distinct party identities, they have worked together at the federal level as a coalition — with brief sojourns — since 1922. As state-based parties, the relationship between the LP (and its antecedents) and the NATS has been different in each jurisdiction, but the relationship at the federal level has been generally co-operative and effective.<sup>34</sup> As political scientist Costar notes, unlike other jurisdictions such as in Europe where coalition governments are accepted as commonplace, the agreements between the LP and the NATS are not written down.<sup>35</sup> Policy is instead worked out through the parliamentary parties' policy making processes and agreements settled between leaders sometimes based on 'a handshake'. The key difference between Australia's Coalition and other jurisdictions is that the NATS has never seriously considered entering into a coalition with the ALP at the federal level, introducing a level of stability into the Coalition partnership. The different interests, constituencies and policy agendas of the two separate parties need to be negotiated around the shadow Cabinet table, as does the allocation of shadow portfolios between the parties, which is linked to the numbers of members each party has in the parliament. Depending on the quality of the leadership offered by the NATS, their influence and impact can vary dramatically (consider the dominance of the Nationals during the Fraser government).<sup>36</sup> In this way we can see the Coalition relationship at the federal level is more like a marriage: a relationship based on shared principles that are reaffirmed through regular debate and

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27. F Bongiorno, 'The Origins of Caucus: 1856-1901', in J Faulkner, S Macintyre, eds, *True Believers: The Story of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party*, Crows Nest, N.S.W: Allen & Unwin, 2001, p. 3–4.

28. Walter, 'Managers or messiahs', op. cit., p. 50.

29. Liberal Party of Australia, *Facing the Facts*, op. cit., p. 48.

30. B Hayden, *Hayden: an autobiography*, Angus and Robertson, Pymble: NSW, 1996, p. 365.

31. Ibid., pp. 322, 329.

32. Weller, 'Transition: taking over power in 1983', op. cit., pp. 304–305.

33 This discussion draws on interviews with current and former party members conducted by the author from August 2012 through to April 2014.

34. See K West, *Power in the Liberal Party: a study in Australian politics*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1965; I Hancock, *The Liberals: a history of the NSW Division of the Liberal Party of Australia 1945–2000*, Federation Press, Annandale, NSW, 2007.

35. B Costar, 'Australia's curious coalition', *Political Science*, 63(1), June 2011, p. 34.

36. Ibid., p. 35.



negotiation. Practicality, ideological alignment and political success are the glue that keeps the Coalition marriage together.<sup>37</sup>

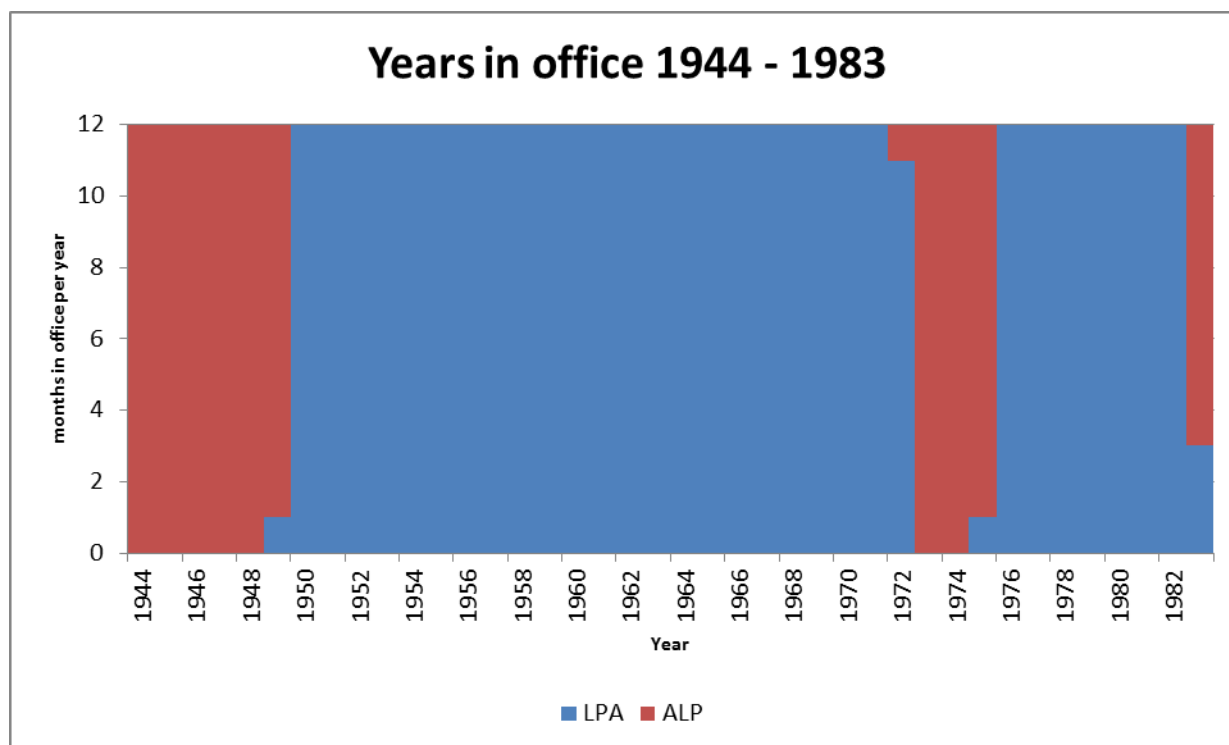
### Coalition thinking about the APS

By the early 1980s both the ALP and LP were interested in the introduction of modern management techniques that would allow them to assert more political control over the Australian Public Service (APS).<sup>38</sup> While both sought a more efficient and effective service, the ALP still believed in government action to make effective change in people’s lives. By contrast, the LP increasingly wanted the size of government reduced. Importantly, the ALP had to consider how to balance and share power between the party caucus and the executive, forcing it to consider how these power relationships would work and how they would safeguard the traditional power of the caucus.<sup>39</sup> These questions pushed the ALP to consider in greater detail questions of implementation.

### Background: historical context

From 1909, with the fusion between George Reid’s Free Traders and Alfred Deakin’s Protectionists until the formation of the LP in 1944 by Sir Robert Menzies, the non-Labor side of politics organised itself under different names but all held in common their opposition to the ALP. Before the LP, non-Labor politics lacked the organisational strength and branch structure of the ALP. The result was a fluid state of political organisation amongst those opposed to the ALP.<sup>40</sup> Non-Labor had dominated the government benches before the Second World War, and the formation of an organised LP consolidated this established trend with Menzies’ victory in 1949. Until the beginning of 1983 the reins of power had remained firmly in the hands of the Coalition, with the exception of Gough Whitlam’s period in government between 1972 and 1975 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Years in office by political party 1944–1983



Source: Compiled by the author

The LP’s political success since its formation meant that, until 1972, the LP had little experience of being in opposition. The short years of the Whitlam Government meant that the LP never had to make a full adjustment to opposition politics and organisation. By 1983, the LP had become a victim of its own success. The party’s infrastructure and personnel had become moribund and underdeveloped compared with the ALP. Additionally,

37. Ibid., p. 36.

38. Jim Carlton, interview with author, 21 November 2013.

39. See J Halligan, and M O’Grady, ‘Public sector reform: exploring the Victorian experience’, *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 44(1) 1985, pp. 34–45; P Weller, ‘Transition: taking over power in 1983’, op. cit., pp. 304–305.

40. See Hancock, *The Liberals: a history of the NSW Division*, op. cit., Chapter 1.

as the high tide of Australian Liberalism was going out, the LP struggled to collectively decide upon a new direction. As Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser's most enduring legacies were in social policy and foreign relations, but his Government constantly struggled to match its rhetoric with its actions on economic reform. The rhetoric of Fraser's economic agenda was strongly oriented towards deregulating the economy and reducing both the amount of government support for Australia's protected manufacturing industries and the overall size of the state itself.<sup>41</sup> However, in policy terms, the Fraser Government moved slower on economic reform than its critics would have liked, leaving many of the reforms, such as floating the dollar, allowing in the foreign banks and dismantling centralised wage fixation to the Hawke government.<sup>42</sup> For the 'dries' within the Party, frustration with these years would become a driving force of the LP's reform agenda in the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>43</sup>

Unlike the ALP, the LP did not approach governance questions as a relatively blank slate upon which to inscribe change. Indeed, as a party that considered itself destined for government, and with huge authority invested in the leader, the LP took for granted how power would be managed between the party and the executive. The parliamentary party's success in maintaining its autonomy and control over policy by excluding the party rank-and-file further consolidated power in the hands of the parliamentary party—or, more accurately, in the hands of its executive. The fact that the parliamentary party bore almost all responsibility for the formulation of policy and the articulation of LP beliefs had an impact on the kinds of questions asked about how power should be divided and what the party should do with its power when in office.

Change was also underway in Australia's public administration. After a series of reviews (Coombs, 1974–76, Bland 1976 and Reid 1982–83) the real question that remained was about when and how reform should happen.<sup>44</sup> Reform initially started at the state level with the Wran government's decision in 1978 to remove the NSW Public Service Board's power to appoint departmental heads in favour of a system where the State Governor would appoint candidates on the recommendation of the cabinet.<sup>45</sup> This was the first of many changes nationwide which aimed to change the management culture, practices and recruitment from one which had punished failure to a culture that was more responsive, results oriented and rewarded good management.

## Preparing to take power

The election defeat in 1983 was a watershed for the LP, and this was reflected in the nature of the documents that were developed. What political parties say about how they wish to govern reveals their priorities, conveys their world view, and demonstrates how coherent their thinking is. Thus, the documents that the Coalition produced in anticipation of returning to government can tell us much about the state of the party during the 1980s and early 1990s.

Significantly, the Coalition was a defeated government in 1983, not the reinvigorated team that the ALP had been when they released *Labor and Quality of Government* in 1980 and its revised edition in 1982. In this context, the party's planning for government 'next time around' was just as much a process of identifying what was wrong with the LP as it was about deciding what the party stood for.

The progression of the documents developed between 1983 and 1989 had three phases. The first diagnostic phase produced *Facing the Facts*, the conclusions of which were slowly developed and translated into policy detail initially through the *Forward Planning Group* and then in *Management of Government* over the following

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40. P Kelly, *The End of Certainty: Power, Politics and Business in Australia*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards: NSW, 1994 p. 36; for examples of Fraser's rhetoric, see his speeches on the economy in DA Kemp and DM White, eds, *Fraser on Australia*, Hill of Content, Melbourne, 1986.

41. P Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, op. cit., Chapter 2

43. During the 1980s, the ideological groupings within the Liberal Party were commonly described as the 'wets' and 'dries'. While these labels had limitations, their regular use made them ready shorthand for describing different views on economic and social policy within the LP. In short, the 'dries' were advocates of neo-liberal market reforms, including deregulation, privatisation, industrial relations reform, and 'small government'. On social policy issues, there was less agreement, but, importantly, these were second order policy issues for the 'dries'. The 'wets' were not as co-ordinated as the 'dries' and their views covered a broader spectrum. What did unite the 'wets' was their greater focus on social policy and environmental issues and their opposition to the scope and extent of the 'dries' economic agenda. It is not that they did not think Australia needed reform during the 1980s, but they felt their colleagues were overzealous in their approach.

44. See Review of Commonwealth Administration, (JB Reid Chairman), *Report*, 1983; Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration (HC Coombs Chairman), *Report*, 1976; for the Administrative Review Committee chaired by Henry Bland, see R Wettenhall and P Gourley, 'Sir Henry Bland and the Fraser Government's Administrative Review Committee: another chapter in the statutory authority wars?', *The Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 68(3), 2009, pp. 351-369.

45. G Allan, 'A Different Agenda: The changing meaning of public service effect and responsiveness in Australia's public services', PhD Thesis, Griffith University, 2005, p 231.

three years. Finally, they were related back to LP philosophy and its *raison d'être* in *Future Directions* in 1988. The work of this earlier period is also directly related to what would follow under John Hewson's influence and then leadership from 1990. However, unlike the documents produced between 1983 and 1989, *Fightback!* was a different kind of policy making process. The following discussion examines each of these phases in more detail.

### **Peacock and Howard 1983–89**

#### **1983: Facing the Facts and the Forward Planning Group**

After losing in 1983, it was time to go back to basics. *Facing the Facts* (also known as *The Valder Report*) was a wide-ranging and scathing assessment of the state of the LP, produced by the organisational wing of the party. It was released at the end of September 1983 and Andrew Peacock, by then party leader, proclaimed it a 'visionary document' and a 'profound reappraisal of the meaning of liberalism'.<sup>46</sup> Although the organisational wing continued to be involved after *Facing the Facts* was released, the Parliamentary LP took over the initiative with the formation of the Forward Planning Group (FPG) under the chairmanship of David Connolly. The FPG built upon the work of the *Facing the Facts* Committee and the presence of David Kemp and Jim Carlton ensured a high level of continuity with the earlier report. In this way, the two documents are linked and ought to be considered together.

A key task of *Facing the Facts* was to assess the party in terms of its historical context and its subsequent development over forty years. It considered the relevance of the LP's philosophy, the health of its branch and organisational structure, and how it should seek to govern again. Significantly, *Facing the Facts* did not start with broad questions asking what the Cabinet, the ministry or the public service should do. Nor did it ask basic questions about how to govern and how to prepare and skill up its shadow Ministry like the ALP had in 1982. Instead, *Facing the Facts* reaffirmed the belief in the traditional Westminster system and reflected the LP's extensive experience in government and its frustrations and disappointment with the Fraser years.

Dissatisfaction with the LP's previous performance fell into two categories: the party's struggles to bend executive power to its will, and the deficiencies of the bureaucracy to implement the LP's policy goals. Indeed, the Party's frustration was aptly summarised by the report's authors' unflattering comparison with Jim Hacker from the British comedy series, *Yes, Minister*, asking who would toil for years to develop a philosophy and policies only to hand the 'whole thing over to Sir Humphrey' after winning government.<sup>47</sup>

#### *Cabinet Plans*

*Facing the Facts* argued that the organisation and work practices of the Cabinet and Prime Ministerial Office (PMO) had undermined the LP's ability to offer political leadership and deliver in government.<sup>48</sup> The report reminded readers that 'the task of Ministers is first and foremost a political task,' and that it is Liberal Ministers that are responsible for 'translating Liberal values into policy.'<sup>49</sup> Additionally, they argued that the Fraser Government had struggled to maintain its focus on its strategic goals and this in turn meant that the government had struggled to explain the reasons for its actions to voters.<sup>50</sup> Complaints of this kind reflected the report's argument that the party had fallen into the trap of pragmatism and expediency and that 'bit by bit our credibility had eroded away'.<sup>51</sup> Success next time meant that government, bureaucracy and staffing structures had to be re-organised to allow the executive to perform its political leadership tasks.<sup>52</sup>

*Facing the Facts* called for reform of the PMO, Cabinet Ministers' offices and support staff's role. The PMO would be dramatically reconfigured: stripped of its policy units and much of its co-ordinating functions and replaced with the Office of Strategic Priorities. This office, no doubt heavily inspired by committee member David Kemp's own experiences as Fraser's chief of staff, would not only co-ordinate Cabinet and keep it focused on the government's 'strategic functions'. It would also be staffed largely by political officers recruited externally

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46. A Peacock (Leader of the Opposition), *The Valder Report: a visionary document*, media release, 30 September 1983. Held in the Australian Parliamentary Library collection.

47. Liberal Party of Australia, *Facing the facts: report of the Liberal Party Committee of Review*, Report, 1983, p. 105.

48. However, *Facing the Facts* did not acknowledge that the policy thrust outlined and advocated for in the report was not the consensus throughout the party and would, in fact, be the cause of tension until the end of the 1980s.

49. Liberal Party of Australia, *Facing the Facts*, op. cit., p. 106.

50. Ibid., p. 109.

51. Ibid., p. 12.

52. Ibid., p. 108.

from the APS. The office would ensure not only the consistency of the government's communications strategy, but also enhance public understanding of the government's 'overall policy framework'.<sup>53</sup>

In both *Facing the Facts* and the FPG, the role of Cabinet Ministers and their support staff was an important area of discussion. With an opportunity to think anew, Cabinet Ministers' roles were reconceived away from administrative drudgery, and redirected towards strategic planning and communication. The report's authors deliberately invoked the private sector executive as their model, arguing that Cabinet Ministers' approach should reflect the work patterns and goals of modern and industrious workplaces.<sup>54</sup>

The implication of these revaluations was the reconfiguration of the Cabinet system as it had existed until this time. Gone were the days of every minister having a department. Rather, the number of Cabinet positions should be reduced to 12 super ministries, or portfolio areas as we know them today. These super ministries would be supported by junior ministers and parliamentary secretaries—a proposal that anticipated the Hawke Government's reforms of the APS in 1987.<sup>55</sup> Unlike the Hawke reforms, the FPG argued for greater independence for junior Ministers in order to relieve the burden on Cabinet Ministers. This included allowing the greatest possible flexibility to make spending and budgetary decisions and serving as the administrative workhorses of the government.<sup>56</sup>

The FPG also reinforced *Facing the Facts'* call for more staff. The party's argument was that, without political staff to manage much of the strategic, political and ideas work, a new government would run the risk of the politicisation of the APS through politically motivated appointments.<sup>57</sup> Second, Cabinet Ministers' had too few opportunities to reflect on the government's performance and strategic direction or to prioritise policy implementation. This was a task made harder for overworked ministers who were essentially receiving advice from career public servants who did not have the same 'philosophical' commitment to the government's agenda.<sup>58</sup> These ideas were translated into a new structure for the top level of government (See Figure 2).

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53. Ibid., p. 109.

54. Ibid.

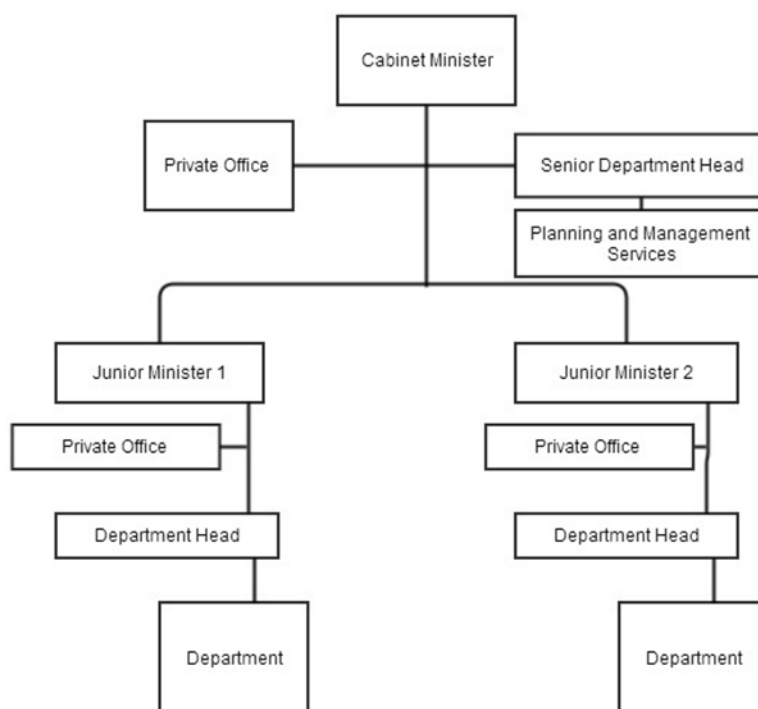
55. J Halligan, I Beckett & P Earnshaw, 'The Australian Public Service reform program', in J Halligan and RL. Wettenhall, eds, *Hawke's third government: Australian Commonwealth administration 1987–1990*, Faculty of Management, University of Canberra and Royal Australian Institute of Public Administration (ACT Division), Belconnen: ACT, c1992, pp. 11–12.

56. Liberal Party of Australia, *Forward Planning Group*, Liberal Party policy document, 1984, p. 11.

57. Ibid., p. 5.

58. Ibid., pp. 1, 4.

Figure 2: Proposed New Structure for Prime Minister and Cabinet



Source: Liberal Party of Australia, *Forward Planning Group*, Liberal Party Policy document, p. 7.

#### *Plans for the Australian Public Service*

At the centre of the LP's critique of the public service was a desire to transform the way the APS related to, and worked with, government. Both *Facing the Facts* and the FPG believed that Australia's Westminster system 'simply cannot cope' with the nature and scope of modern government.<sup>59</sup> However, the LP's intention was to keep the British model, but reinvent it as a 'leaner, less intrusive system'.<sup>60</sup>

*Facing the Facts* advocated much of the New Public Management agenda that had been introduced in Victoria.<sup>61</sup> The report railed against an APS culture which, they argued:

- had the tendency to recommend options in line with the department's own institutional interests
- involved white collar unions eroding political neutrality within the service, and
- was influenced by the APS's overall 'antiquated' management structure.<sup>62</sup>

The report's authors argued that the worth of departments should be assessed by 'their capacity to respond to the requirements of the Liberal Party in office with high quality advice and effective implementation', rather than the size of operating budgets or the number of programs and regulations initiated.<sup>63</sup>

The vision presented by the FPG was for greater responsibility and correspondingly greater accountability for spending decisions by department heads. The report's vision for the public service was more dynamic and responsive with a work culture that emphasised personal responsibility and reward for effort rather than the traditional seniority system.<sup>64</sup> In a public service where managers were liberated to manage and asked to take

59. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

60. *Ibid.*, p.1.

61. For New Public Management's introduction in Victoria, see J Halligan, 'Public sector reform: exploring the Victorian experience,' *op. cit.*, pp. 34–45; RB Cullen, 'The Victorian Senior Executive Service: a performance based approach to the management of senior managers', *The Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 45(1), 1986, pp. 60–73.

62. Liberal Party of Australia, *Facing the Facts*, *op. cit.*, 108.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

64. Liberal Party of Australia, *Forward Planning Group*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

on the responsibility for both success and failure, the service would be adaptive and able to allocate human and capital resources logically and efficiently. Finally, the introduction of performance measurements would, it was argued, shift the whole focus of public sector thinking away from resource accumulation and spending portfolio allocations, to one where efficiency and cost-effectiveness was paramount.<sup>65</sup>

### **1987: Management of Government**

Despite significant political turmoil inside the LP and a change of leadership, the broad goals of *Management of Government*, the LP's 1987 election policy on the APS, remained largely the same as *Facing the Facts* and the FPG. For example the LP continued to advocate for the Cabinet structure outlined in *Facing the Facts* (and explicated in the FPG), in order that Cabinet ministers could be 'relieved' of administrative duties, free to focus on strategic and communication objectives.<sup>66</sup> However some ideas, such as the Office of Strategic Priorities and the explicit call for additional political staff, were dropped.

More importantly, by 1987, a clear policy agenda for government had been identified including: reduced taxation coupled with expenditure control; restoration of appropriate incentives affecting social security, health and education portfolios; wages policy and industrial relations; industry restructuring, deregulation and the re-invigoration of the investment climate for business; and, Commonwealth/State relations.<sup>67</sup>

By 1988, the Hawke Government's program of APS reform was well underway. In response, the LP gave credit to the Hawke government for its 'serious attempt' to improve the professionalism and efficiency of the APS.<sup>68</sup> Howard called for further action in relation to a system of junior ministries, particularly in the treasury portfolio, a deregulated salary structure for senior APS staff and a shareholder ownership society facilitated by the privatisation of Australian government assets.<sup>69</sup> Howard echoed earlier concerns about the ability of the APS to serve the political needs of the government, again arguing that a system of explicitly political advisors would serve not only the government better but protect the public service from overt politicisation.<sup>70</sup> The policy goals of *Management of Government* and the ideas developed throughout 1988 were translated into *Future Directions*.<sup>71</sup> Published in December 1988, *Future Directions: It's time for plain thinking*, was Howard's distinctive interpretation of the reform ideas and arguments debated and advocated since the LP's defeat in 1983.

### **The Hewson experiment 1989–1993**

#### **1989: Contracting Out and Economic Action Plan**

John Hewson's elevation to the shadow Treasurer's role in the wake of the lightning leadership change in 1989 that saw Andrew Peacock replace John Howard, marked a significant turning point in the both the nature of the Coalition's strategy for its preparation for government and the way it was marketed to voters. Previously, planning for government and policy planning for public administration was part of the broader Coalition policy making framework. Under the influence and later the direction of Hewson, this whole process took on a philosophically-rigorous and detailed turn.

Hewson had worked internationally, served as economic advisor to then Treasurer Howard and, through his weekly columns in *Business Review Weekly (BRW)* in the mid-1980s, had crafted an image as an articulate and honest advocate for economic reform.<sup>72</sup> Hewson's intellectual depth, honesty and appeal to high-minded politics refreshed the LP's economic reform sales pitch, which had suffered under the weight of internal disunity and multiple election losses.

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65. Ibid., p. 11.

66. Liberal Party of Australia, *Management of government: the Liberal approach*, Liberal Party policy document, 1987, pp. 3–4.

67. Ibid., p. 3.

68. J Howard (Leader of the Opposition), *Edited transcript of address by the Hon. John Howard MP, Leader of the Opposition to the Royal Australian Institute of Public Administration*, media release, 28 October 1988, p. 2. Held in the Australian Parliamentary Library Collection.

69. Ibid., pp. 3, 6.

70. Ibid., p. 3.

71. Liberal Party of Australia and National Party of Australia, *Future directions: it's time for plain thinking*, Coalition policy document, 1988.

72. N Abjorensen, *John Hewson: a biography*, Lothian Books, Port Melbourne, Vic., 1993, pp. 88–89, 94–95, 165–66; C Wallace, *Hewson: a portrait*, Pan Macmillan, Sydney, 1993, p. 175.

As shadow Treasurer to the newly reinstated Andrew Peacock in 1989, Hewson released *Contracting Out*, a short document explaining the rationale behind the process. He argued that the competitive tender process would not only produce cheaper services and shine a light on unproductive and poor work practices, but also imbue a sense of cost-consciousness in the provision of services.<sup>73</sup> Drawing on a report from the Centre for Independent Studies, Hewson argued that cost savings for the government could be up to 20 per cent.<sup>74</sup> Significantly, the very process of calling for tenders would grant departments an opportunity to consider—perhaps for the first time—what kind of public goods ought to be provided, to set clear criteria for their implementation and to measure their efficacy.<sup>75</sup>

This was followed by the *Economic Action Plan* released later in the year which included the Coalition's first explicit 'transition to government plan'. Unlike the ALP's weighty document released in late 1982, the Coalition's was a rather more modest single page of principles for a transfer to government. However, it laid down the basic formula which has been repeated by newly-minted Coalition governments to this day. First would be an audit of Commonwealth finances and an industry commission to set a reform agenda. Both these documents would underpin an Economic Statement outlining the Coalition's economic reform strategy within three months of winning office.<sup>76</sup> It also highlighted three areas for legislative reform: industrial relations, coastal shipping and waterfront reform.<sup>77</sup>

### **1991: *Fightback!***

Unique in Australian political history, *Fightback!* was both an economic model that outlined far-reaching taxation and micro-economic reform, and a coherent philosophical framework which underpinned *Fightback!*'s policy detail. However, it was not just the ideas or the economic models that made *Fightback!* remarkable, but also the rigorous processes which asked not only *what* the LP wanted to do in government but also *how* it would implement its program. The LP had asked the 'what' questions before, but had never seriously engaged with *how* they would be implemented in government.

After the 1990 election, Hewson's main priority was to restore the party's policy credibility, a deficit which *Fightback!* attempted to address.<sup>78</sup> Hewson argued that the Coalition needed a strategic objective which would underpin the policies they would take to the 1993 election.<sup>79</sup> This framework would be based on positioning Australia within the Asia-Pacific in the year 2000. The resulting document which drew on a broad appeal to the public, *Australia 2000* would become a key source for the framing of *Fightback!*.<sup>80</sup> Characterised by detailed policy argument, *Fightback!* laid bare the underlying assumptions of the LP's policy goals and were supported by economic modelling or projected savings, revenue increases or earnings. Moreover, *Fightback!* was able to take many of the ideas previously advocated in earlier policy documents and ground them in a coherent and internally consistent philosophical framework.

*Fightback!* explained, according to the Coalition's world view, the limits of markets. This was not simple advocacy of *laissez-faire*, but rather the utilisation of markets as a tool to deliver a better society. Properly functioning markets were, the parties argued, 'the by-product of an ethical community' and, because markets were based on the principles of 'voluntary co-operation and decentralised decision-making, they also create the only conditions in which a moral community can emerge and be sustained.'<sup>81</sup>

The 'enemy' in *Fightback!* was not so much the Hawke Government, or the socialistic forces demonised in *Future Directions*, but rather the monopolistic power, coercive government policy and preferential treatment of one set

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73. J Hewson, *Contracting out: a means to cost savings and better value for money in government*, Coalition policy document, 1989, p. 2.

74. *Ibid.*; The Centre for Independent Studies was one of a number of conservative political think tanks that had emerged during the course of the 1980s.

75. J Hewson, *Contracting out*, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

76. Liberal Party of Australia and National Party of Australia, *Economic action plan: The Liberal-National Parties' economic and tax policy*, Coalition policy document, 1989, p. 24.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

78. Abjorensen, *John Hewson: a biography*, *op. cit.*, pp., 156–57.

79. John Hewson, interview with author, 8 April 2014.

80. Liberal Party of Australia, *Australia 2000*, Liberal Party document, 6 September 1991.

81. Liberal Party of Australia and National Party of Australia, *Fightback!: the way to rebuild and reward Australia: executive summary*, Coalition policy document, 1991, p. 27.

of citizens over another.<sup>82</sup> *Fightback!* accused the Hawke Government of all three, powerfully arguing that, under Hawke, 'government fails to treat different citizens and different sections of the community equally.'<sup>83</sup> With its explanation of the limits of markets and its fierce critique of different treatment for different citizens, *Fightback!* linked itself back to Menzies' rhetoric about the debilitating effects of governments pandering to sectional interests. Yet, the LP simultaneously moved decidedly towards a position on the economy which Menzies had decried as insufficient, and which he had called merely 'keeping the ring'.<sup>84</sup>

Importantly, *Fightback!* was also as much a series of processes as it was a policy document. Hewson's new regime offered more structure and guidance than shadow Ministers had enjoyed (or endured) before or since this time. One of Hewson's first initiatives was to order party-wide reflection, organising the *The Way Ahead* seminar weekend shortly after the 1990 election defeat. Its purpose was to re-examine how the Coalition should operate as an opposition with regard to policy making and internal party management.<sup>85</sup> Another was his request—previously unattempted—that all shadow Ministers write to him outlining how they understood their role, the strategic approach the opposition should take in their respective policy areas and their reform agenda.<sup>86</sup> The responses varied considerably, reflecting the attitudes, skill sets and approaches of his shadow Ministry.

Hewson's internal organisational architecture included a new policy committee structure which organised policy areas into seven groups in order to troubleshoot policy before it reached the shadow Cabinet. For example, what impact would changes made in health have on related policy area like aged care? The goal was to build up the capacity of the shadow Ministry and attempted to compensate for the weaknesses of individual shadows.<sup>87</sup> Hewson also established a Policy Co-ordination and Development Committee (PCDC) chaired by Jim Carlton. The PCDC's work related to helping craft a holistic picture of the Coalition's policy priorities across all portfolio areas. It was the PCDC which asked shadow Ministers to review their policy areas and to outline areas in need of reform in the short and medium terms, in addition to proposing a vision for Australia in the year 2000.<sup>88</sup>

### The Transition to Government Group

The Transition to Government Group (TGG), jointly chaired by David Kemp and Jim Carlton, was tasked with planning for the smooth transition of the opposition into government. The now Hon Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells<sup>89</sup> worked on secondment as a key advisor to Carlton from 1990 through to the 1993 election, and was instrumental in the development and final design of the TGG's proposals. The TGG process grew directly out of the policy work around *Fightback!* and was concerned with how the Coalition could best implement their radical reform package once in government.<sup>90</sup> This paper is not able to consider all aspects of the TGG planning which, over two and half years, undertook a wide-ranging assessment of machinery of government issues including:

- structure of the executive branch and the PMO
- staffing arrangements, guidelines and comparisons of roles and functions within the existing government
- an interim strategy document for the reform of the Senior Executive Service of the APS
- the state of departmental structures within the APS and proposals for its re-organisation
- assessments of all research capacities within departments and statutory authorities, with recommendations for agencies or capacities to be retained, merged or cut, and

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82. For example, during 1983–1993, LP made constant attacks on the Hawke Government's links with the union movement and corporatist tendencies. The LP also regularly bemoaned the Hawke Government's coercive policies, usually referring to increasing regulation or tax and by the late 1980s and early 1990s, the LP had developed the theme about special interest groups, lobbies and 'mates' which the Hawke Government favoured over ordinary Australians, such as the unions, indigenous groups or the 'ethnic lobby'.

83. Liberal Party of Australia and National Party of Australia, *Fightback!*, op. cit., p. 28.

84. R Menzies, *The Forgotten People*, 22 May 1942, accessed 30 June 2014.

85. National Archives of Australia: Hon. Frederick Michael Chaney AO; M3417, Folders of papers maintained by Mr Chaney; 861; 'The Way Ahead' Seminar for Liberal members and senators 1990.

86. National Archives of Australia: Hon. James Joseph Carlton AO; M3729, Personal papers of James Joseph Carlton, 1987–1993; Box 39/Folder 9.

87. John Hewson, interview with author, 8 April 2014.

88. National Archives of Australia: Hon. James Joseph Carlton AO; M3729, Personal papers of James Joseph Carlton, 1987–1993; Box 39, 'Policy Issue Charts'.

89. At this time the now Hon Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells was known by her maiden name Concetta Fierravanti.

90. Jim Carlton, interview with author, 21 November 2013.



- an assessment of the roles of the heads of statutory authorities and agencies.<sup>91</sup>

The TGG also considered options to either support the Coalition's efforts to win government or smooth the transition process, :

- consideration and development of a Senate majority strategy
- a parliamentary reform proposal
- prioritising legislation and drafting to speed up the reform process once in government
- consideration and development of a post-election communications strategy
- preparation for a seminar to train new ministers post-election victory
- an analysis of the three previous transitions to government in 1972, 1975 and 1983, and
- a detailed report, *Transition to Government*.

Two significant documents produced by the TGG were *Departmental Secretaries and the Senior Executive Service: an Interim strategy* and *Transition to Government*. The *Interim Strategy* recognised that the Coalition's stated long term goal of putting all APS staff onto contracts would require changes to legislation and that the Coalition would need to work with the APS under its current statutory form for some time. An *Interim Strategy*, authored by Concetta Fierravanti, provided an examination, based on research about how the SES currently worked under the Keating Government, and what changes would be required. The draft document was honest in acknowledging that *Fightback!*'s successful implementation depended on co-operation with the APS. Fierravanti examined two options for securing co-operation. One proposal was for a minimalist model that would seek to change only a few selected Heads of Departments. The other was to spill all departmental secretary positions and potentially achieve sweeping change.<sup>92</sup> The *Interim Strategy* also drew heavily from the reform process underway in New South Wales under the new Greiner Coalition government. The TGG sought access to the NSW draft material in order to learn from its experience, and borrowed ideas such as the introduction of a Ministerial code of conduct.<sup>93</sup>

*Transition to Government* was finalised on the eve of the 1993 election and included a systematic plan for the Coalition's transition into power. The report was the culmination of two and half years of research, draft papers and discussion internally within the TGG and the LP leader's office.<sup>94</sup> *Transition to Government* included timetables for the first two weeks in government and provisional timetables stretching out until June 1993. It also included key policies to be announced within the first two weeks of the Hewson Government. In addition, *Transition to Government* provided the leader with advice for the Coalition's post-election communications strategy and the exact number of support staff to be issued to Ministers. It also detailed procedures for managing Coalition and party room relationships, the minutiae of the formal transition process and recalling parliament, and the timely occupation of executive wing offices.<sup>95</sup>

The report also addressed how the Ministry, executive branch and the PMO would be structured. The TGG spent considerable time examining how the Keating Government was structured and the effectiveness of how individual departmental structures operated. Through this investigation, the TGG proposed as slightly smaller ministry and re-organised some portfolios, most notably industry. The TGG also outlined new plans for a re-organised PMO, which would see the return of the Office of Strategic Priorities, first proposed in *Facing the Facts*, although Hewson's PMO (see Figure 3) reflected the growing complexity of government compared with the early 1980s.

91. At the time of writing, I had gained access to these documents during the last few weeks of the research project. Consequently, it has not been possible to develop this paper in such a way to examine all the material uncovered.

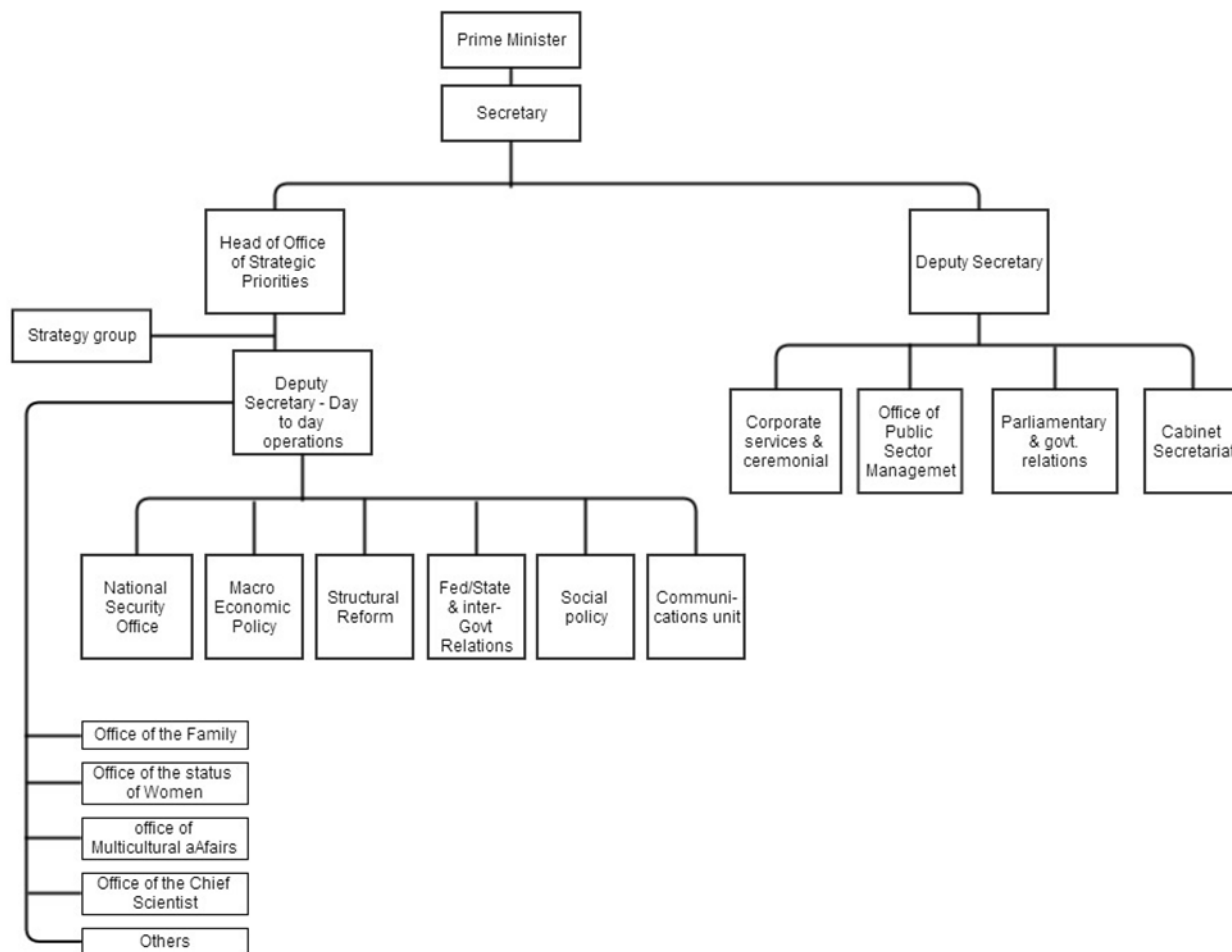
92. National Archives of Australia: Hon. James Joseph Carlton AO; M3729, Personal papers of James Joseph Carlton, 1987–1993; Box 42/ Folder 1; *Departmental Secretaries and the Senior Executive Service: An Interim Strategy* pp. 19–20.

93. National Archives of Australia: Hon. James Joseph Carlton AO; M3729, Personal papers of James Joseph Carlton, 1987–1993; Box 42, Transition to Government: C Ferravanti; *Establishment of the Senior Executive Service in NSW 1988–1992*, Vol 1 (Draft).

94. It is unclear if TGG papers were submitted to Shadow Cabinet.

95. National Archives of Australia: Hon. James Joseph Carlton AO; M3729, Personal papers of James Joseph Carlton, 1987–1993; Box 42/ Folder2; *Transition to Government*, pp. 20–21, 26–28, 30–31.

Figure 3: Proposed structure for the PMO under a Hewson Government



Source: National Archives of Australia: Hon. James Joseph Carlton AO; M3729, Personal papers of James Joseph Carlton, 1987–1993; Box 42/ Folder2; *Transition to Government*, p. 16.

In the Coalition's eagerness to transform Australia, no stone was left unturned and nothing—at least for the new government's first few weeks—would be left to chance. To date, no other opposition has taken planning for government as seriously as Hewson had in 1993. A new Hewson Government was perhaps better placed than any previous incoming government to get on with the job. Yet, despite all their careful preparations to govern, the party could not translate their planning efforts into an effective electoral strategy. Instead, Paul Keating won 'the sweetest victory' in 1993. All the TGG's planning and effort had been for nought and many Coalition figures concluded the party had put the horse before the cart: planning for government, but failing to invest in winning the election first.<sup>96</sup>

### Liberals in the wilderness: reflecting on thirteen years in opposition 1983–96

From 1983 to 1993, the deep question that lay at the heart of the Coalition's thinking about government was not the ALP's 'how do we govern?' but rather 'what should government do?' The answer was loud and clear. Do less of everything.

At their core, the Coalition's plans were about reorganisation and transformation of government that would liberate citizens to succeed or to fail on their own merits. The Coalition's policy documents about the management of government are littered with a profusion of de- and re- prefixed words: deregulate, re-allocate, restructure, reduce, review and their cousins in meaning: rationalise, privatise, transfer. In its place, government would emerge as a limber, flexible, reflective, responsive, efficient, competition-focused, driven, professional, merit-based and accountable service. It would, and should, emulate much of the values and dynamism of the private sector and be governed by most of the same competitive incentives. This vision for the public service was a distinct step away from existing public sector practice as it had been in 1983, and the reform vision went

96 Williams, *The victory inside the takeover of Australia*, op. cit., p. 323.

further than the ALP's reforms enacted whilst in government. Despite its reform agenda, the LP still paid lip-service to the spirit of Westminster practice: a permanent, neutral and professional public service.

At times, the LP's thinking demonstrated creativity in its approach to machinery of government questions. Both *Facing the Facts* and the FPG were radical in their scope, dramatically shifting the LP away from the political assumptions that underpinned the Fraser years. Indeed, both *Facing the Facts* and the FPG had flashes of idealism, whether it was the suggestion that backbenchers could be more effectively used by Cabinet Ministers as assistants to help maintain the day to day politics and strategic positioning of the party, or the suggestion in the FPG that, after initial considerations of state origins, the selection to the ministry ought to be based on merit alone rather than internal political considerations.<sup>97</sup> All were virtuous ideas, but all too prone to erosion at the edges in the face of a government's desire for political management and control. This was a time of exploration or making it up as they went along. After 1985, the LP's thinking became more business-like and more focused on working out the finer details. Enough LP parliamentarians had decided to embrace the reform agenda of the 1980s. Now it was a matter of working out how exactly how far to go and in what directions.

This is not to suggest that ideas in these documents were not subject to criticism. On the contrary, the assumptions underpinning *Facing the Facts* and the FPG sought to overturn many of the underlying assumptions of government that had held sway in the LP until the early 1980s. *Facing the Facts* was fiercely criticised internally, especially by small 'l' Liberal figures such as Alan Missen.<sup>98</sup> Yet, crucially, dissenting Liberals struggled to engage with the content of *Facing the Facts* on specific terms and to craft an alternative response. This was partly due to the way policy was crafted in the LP (divided up between 'specialist' shadow Ministers, supported by backbench committees) and the fact that many of the small 'l' Liberals were more interested in social rather than economic policy areas. Criticism of the LP's move away from the Fraser legacy would be an important point of conflict within the party until the 1990 election.

Internal criticism is the reason that radical proposals were slower to work their way into the Coalition's official policy platforms, only gaining the ascendancy after John Howard became leader in 1985. Despite initial setbacks, many of the core assumptions within *Facing the Facts* about a need for change in the role of government *did* weave their way into early Coalition policy documents forming a bridgehead upon which future, more radical reform ideas would develop.

Unlike Labor's sister document, *Labor and Quality of Government* and, with the exception of the *Fightback!* process, the Coalition spent little time considering the realities of implementation and potential roadblocks beyond criticising the management and cultural practices of the APS. Whether this was because of a lack of consideration or the result of deep experience in government is unclear from the documents themselves. The assumption embedded in these documents stayed largely at the level of the big picture: if the Coalition got the ideas, assumptions and incentives right, this would ensure that the right processes would follow.

A solid philosophical base and credible policy proposals lent *Fightback!* significant credence. Moreover, thorough internal processes were the first serious attempt by the Coalition to plan to transition into government. The internal planning documents reveal that the Coalition's ten-year absence from power had eroded its knowledge and familiarity with the system. Reform had transformed the public service, forcing the Coalition to come to grips with the new system from the vantage point of opposition. Significantly, the LP's planning documents also reflect a change, even hardening, of attitudes towards the APS. Much of the critique of the APS had been about its inability to match the expectations of Ministers in the Fraser Government. By 1993, *An Interim Strategy* stated even more baldly the sentiments from *Facing the Facts* and the FPG: that the APS was 'operating in a political reality whereby the public service simply implements the decisions of the Cabinet and the Parliament', and needed to work with and to government rather than a more traditional understanding of Westminster public administration.<sup>99</sup>

### ***The role of the leader***

The preferences of leaders were important to how planning for government operated and the final products produced. Both John Howard and John Hewson sought to impose their visions wholly onto the LP. John Howard staked his credibility to lead the LP on his policy substance and his advocacy for ideas. Hewson, as an economist,

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97. Liberal Party of Australia, *Forward Planning Group*, op. cit., p. 8.

98. A Hermann, *Alan Missen: Liberal pilgrim: a political biography*, The Poplar Press, Woden ACT, 1993, pp. 164–65.

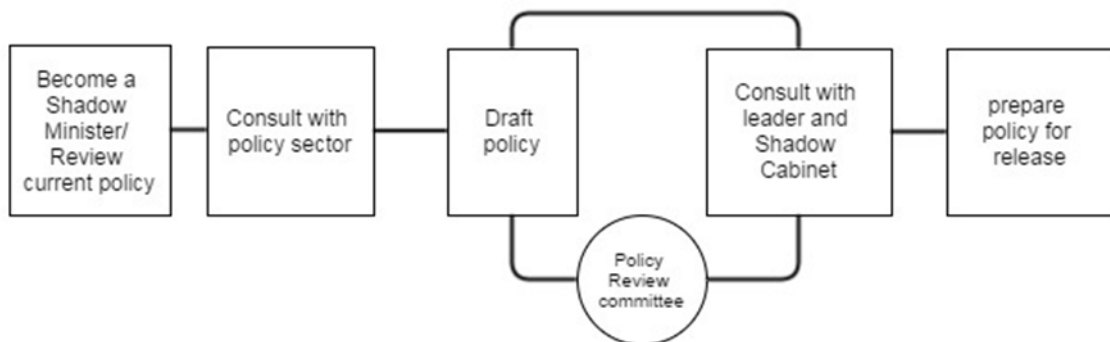
99. National Archives of Australia: Hon. James Joseph Carlton AO; M3729, Personal papers of James Joseph Carlton, 1987–1993; Box 42/ Folder 1; *Departmental Secretaries and the Senior Executive Service: An Interim Strategy*, p. 9.

rested his authority and credibility on his policy credentials and the professionalisation of the policy making processes within the LP. Both Hewson and Howard owned their policy frameworks, most of which were established within their offices. The shadow Cabinet was consulted, but not at the point of design. Rather, the leader asked his shadow Cabinet for advice and endorsement of substantive work already completed.

Andrew Peacock, on the other hand, was a different kind of leader. His style was more akin to a chairman of the board. Given Peacock's relative inexperience in domestic policy fields, his approach was flexible and its strength lay in his ability to choose from options and refine and establish a consensus amongst the ideas surrounding him. However, Peacock was seen as slow to adopt a view and was continually dogged by charges that he did not believe in anything.

Until this time policy making had operated like this:

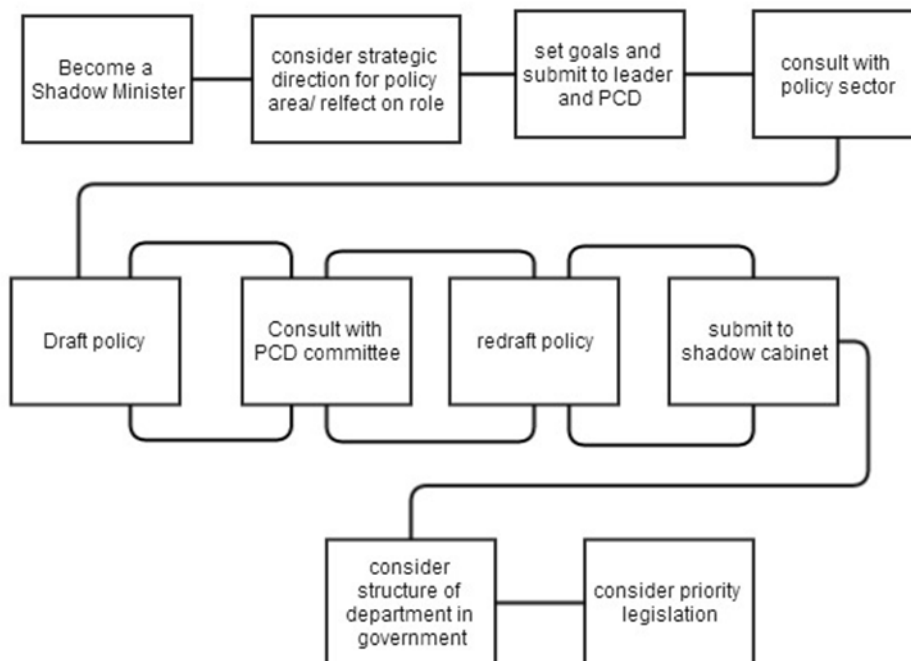
**Figure 4: Policy and planning process 1983–90, 1994–96**



Source: Compiled by the author

By comparison, the Hewson process operated like this:

**Figure 5: Policy and planning process 1990–94**



Source: Compiled by the author

Importantly, under Hewson the process for the development of policy and preparation for government was different. This process provided increased oversight and regularly required shadow Ministers to report to the leader, the PCDC or the TGG. The result was that shadow Ministers needed to be more engaged, more accountable and to produce more detailed and sophisticated material earlier in the electoral cycle. Policy work

and preparation for government was integrated more thoroughly into the Coalition's broader goals. It was also a more centralised system but, by using Carlton and Kemp's office through the PCDC and TGG, it relieved some of the burden from Hewson's office. The regular requests for shadow Ministers to provide assessments in their portfolio areas set clearer benchmarks and made it easier to work out the weak links in the shadow Ministry. However, not all shadow Ministers appreciated this new style of running the opposition. Many complained of a distant leader. Neil Brown, former deputy leader of the LP under John Howard, decided to retire, stating that he felt 'a bit out of place' in the new opposition.<sup>100</sup>

However, *Fightback!* did not deliver electoral victory. In the lead up to the 1996 election, the LP deliberately refrained from engaging in too much planning for fear of jinxing their chances at victory. Failure in 1993 intensified a tendency in Australian politics, identified by Uhr, for official opposition parties to focus on election campaign planning.<sup>101</sup> The Hewson years proved to be a brief experiment, with the LP returning to its more traditional approach in the lead up to the 1996 election: establishing broad principles in *The Role of Government*, providing routine policy documents and discussing some changes to the APS with key staff members.<sup>102</sup> Yet, despite defeat, *Fightback!* had been a significant exercise in the art of crafting policy and strengthening advocacy for the LP's next term in office from 1996 to 2007 under John Howard. It also represented the high-water mark of the LP's efforts to institutionalise the processes of the opposition within its own party structures. *Fightback!* was instructive to the new Howard Government, as a lesson in both politics and good process.

## Conclusion

From 1983 to 1993 the LP in opposition underwent a period of policy reform and political redefinition. The LP, with its Coalition partner the NATS, experimented with sequential approaches to preparing for government. From the exploratory and diagnostic process of *Facing the Facts* and the FPG, through to the routine policy document typified by *Management of Government*, and finally to the strident but policy-rich content of *Fightback!*, each type of planning placed a premium on ideas, principles and political values. Getting these right was important to the LP in this period.

Much of the work of planning for government was about balancing politics and procedure and how to combine the two most effectively. By the 1990s, the LP increasingly felt it was important to be more prescriptive and detailed. Policy ideas were the currency by which they would build their credibility as an alternative government, and a great investment was made in the clarity and rigour of their vision. Leadership also played a significant role, given that this study demonstrates how the leader's own preferences shaped policy priorities, tactics and timing as shown through a document like *Fightback!*.

This study builds on, but also, challenges academic assessments of Coalition preparation and planning attempts. Walter is right to argue that the Coalition places an important emphasis on leadership and broad policy principles. However, the Coalition also engaged in rigorous and detailed planning which has not been fully appreciated by political scientists. If the Coalition had won the 1993 election, with its detailed manifesto, other oppositions would have been tempted and encouraged to follow its example, even to a limited degree. As it was, *Fightback!* was not sufficient to attract the support of the electorate and, from a seemingly unassailable position, Hewson did not win government. Hence Hewson's determination to present a detailed policy manifesto well before an election was called has merely served to raise questions about the value of oppositions engaging in and issuing preparations and plans for government. Indeed, as a result of the 1993 defeat detailed policy preparation undertaken in *Fightback!* was discredited. *Fightback!* is now regularly referred to as the 'longest suicide note in Australian political history' and is regularly used by journalists to explain why political parties hold back policy detail and refrain from being too specific. Yet, many would argue that voters ought to have a clearer idea of what alternative governments want to achieve when they obtain power, and political parties would be better served by having clearer priorities before gaining office. While planning and preparation for government clearly is not critical to winning elections, it remains an important step in political parties training for government.

On the basis of this study it is important to reassess and re-evaluate the attempts of political parties to ready themselves for government. Further study of this area can only enrich the pool of knowledge which our

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100. Abjorensen, *John Hewson: a biography*, op. cit., pp. 149, 159.

101. J Uhr, 'Parliamentary oppositional leadership', in P t'Hart, J Kane and H Patapan, eds, *Dispersed democratic leadership: origins, dynamics and implications*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2009, p. 74.

102. J Howard, '[The role of government](#)', Canberra, 6 June 1995, accessed 22 July 2014; P Williams, *The victory: inside the takeover of Australia*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1997, pp. 323–24.

alternative governments can draw upon as they themselves seek to prepare themselves to become good governments.

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National Archives of Australia: Hon. James Joseph Carlton AO; M3729, Personal papers of James Joseph Carlton, 1987–1993; Box 42/ Folder 2; *Transition to Government*.

National Archives of Australia: Hon. James Joseph Carlton AO; M3729, Personal papers of James Joseph Carlton, 1987–1993; Box 42/ Folder 1; *Departmental Secretaries and the Senior Executive Service: An Interim Strategy*.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Leaders of the Opposition 1983–96**

Peacock, AS 11.3.1983–5.9.1985

Howard, JW 5.9.1985–9.5.1989

Peacock, AS 9.5.1989–3.4.1990

Hewson, JR 3.4.1990–23.5.1994

Downer, AJG 23.5.1994–30.1.1995

Howard, JW 30.1.1995–11.3.1996

### **Deputy Leaders of the Opposition 1983–96**

Howard, JW 16.3.1983–5.9.1985

Brown, NA, QC 5.9.1985–17.7.1987

Peacock, AS 17.7.1987–9.5.1989

Chaney, Senator FM 9.5.1989–3.4.1990

Reith, PK 3.4.1990–23.3.1993

Wooldridge, MRL 23.3.1993–23.5.1994

Costello, PH 23.5.1994–11.3.1996

### **Jim Carlton**

Jim Carlton was the member for Mackellar (NSW) from 1977–94. Before entering parliament, Carlton was the General Secretary of the NSW Division of the Liberal Party from 1971–77. From 1983–93, Jim Carlton held the following shadow Cabinet positions:

#### *Peacock years 1983–85*

- Health 16.3.1983–14.12.1984

#### *Howard Years 1985–89*

- Treasurer 9.9.1985–14.8.1987
- Education 14.8.1987–16.9.1988

#### *Peacock Years 1989–90*

- Defence 12.5.1989–11.4.1990

#### *Hewson Years 1990–94*

- Policy Co-ordination and Development and Social Policy and Health Group (Chair) 11.4.1990–28.4.1992
- Transition to Government 28.4.1992–7.4.1993
- Family, Social and Health Policy Group (chair) and Aged 28.4.1992–7.8.1992
- Reform and Environment group and Sustainable Development 7.8.1992–7.4.1993

### **David Connolly**

David Connolly was the member for Bradfield (NSW) from 1974–96. From 1983–93, David Connolly held the following shadow Cabinet positions:

#### *Peacock years 1983–85*

- Environment and industry 16.3.1983–9.9.1985
- Public Administration 16.3.1983–14.8.1987
- Arts and Heritage 14.12.1984–9.9.1985

#### *Howard Years 1985–89*

- Public Administration 16.3.1983–14.8.1987
- Aboriginal Affairs 9.9.1985–14.8.1987
- Social Security 14.8.1987–11.4.1990
- Superannuation and retirement 16.9.1988–11.4.1990

#### *Peacock Years 1989–90*

- Social Security 14.8.1987–11.4.1990
- Superannuation and retirement 16.9.1988–11.4.1990

#### *Hewson Years 1990–94*

- Secretary to the shadow Cabinet 9.5.1990–23.5.1992
- *Fightback!* Co-ordination and Marketing, Deputy Chairman, 28.4.1992–7.4.1993
- Social Security 23.5.1992–7.4.1993
- Administrative Services and Privatisation 7.4.1993–26.5.1994

### **Dr John Hewson**

Dr John Hewson was leader of the Opposition from 1990–94. He was the member for Wentworth (NSW) from 1987–94. Prior to entering parliament, John Hewson had served as an economic advisor to Treasurers Phil Lynch and John Howard from 1976–83. During his political career until 1993, Dr John Hewson held the following positions:

#### *Howard Years 1985–89*

- Finance 16.9.1988–12.5.1989

#### *Peacock Years 1989–90*

Treasurer 12.5.1989–11.4.1990

#### *Portfolios held while leader 1990–94*

- Arts and Heritage 7.4.1993–26.5.1994

### **John Howard**

John Howard is a former Prime Minister of Australia (1996–2007). He was the member for Bennelong (NSW) from 1974–2007. He was leader of the Opposition from 1985–89 and then from 1995–96 before winning the 1996 election. From 1983–93, John Howard held the following positions:

#### *Peacock Years 1983–85*

- Treasurer 16.3.1983–5.9.1985

#### *Peacock Years 1989–90*

- Industry, Technology and Commerce, 28.10.1989–11.4.1990

#### *Hewson Years 1990–94*

- Manpower and Labour Market Reform Group (Chair), Employment and training and Public Service 11.4.1990–7.4.1993
- Industrial Relations 11.4.1990–31.1.1995

### **Prof David Kemp**

David Kemp was the member for Goldstein (Vic) from 1990–2004. Prior to entering Parliament, Kemp worked as an advisor to Malcolm Fraser from 1975–76 and returned as his Chief of Staff in 1981. From 1990–93, Professor David Kemp held the following shadow Cabinet positions:

#### *Hewson Years 1990–94*

- Education and shadow Minister assisting the leader of science 11.4.1990–7.4.1993
- Transport 28.4.1992–7.4.1993
- Industry, Structural Reform and Environment Group ( Chair), Party development, Science and technology and Export and Development 7.4.1993–26.5.1994

#### **Andrew Peacock**

Andrew Peacock was twice leader of the Opposition and leader of the Liberal Party of Australia from 1983–85 and from 1989–90. Peacock was the member for Kooyong (Vic) from 1966–94. From 1983–93, Andrew Peacock held the following positions:

#### *Howard Years 1985–89*

- Foreign Affairs 9.9.1985–23.3.1987
- Treasurer 14.8.1987–12.5.1989

#### *Hewson Years 1990–94*

- Public Administration Group (Chair), Attorney–General and Justice 11.4.1990–28.4.1992
- Trade 28.4.1992–7.4.1993
- Foreign Affairs 7.4.1993–17.9.1994

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