

2004

Pre-election

Publicly this is the best known period of my parliamentary career: the early success of my Labor leadership, the Howard Government's political fight-back after the May Budget, the six-week election campaign, our election defeat on 9 October, the recriminations within the ALP after the loss, and finally, my resignation from Parliament in January 2005. Privately, there were many other issues and considerations that influenced my actions during this period. The Diaries tell this story. For me it is the most important and powerful part of the book.

The best summary of what happened in 2004 I can offer is this: I became increasingly disillusioned with the major institutions I had to deal with—the media, the machine culture of the ALP and the prospects of meaningful parliamentary reform in Australia—and was shattered by the impact of work on my health, privacy and family life. My career had come full circle, and I returned to the conclusions I reached in 1999–2000 about the futility of Labor politics. This time, when an opportunity arose to leave the Labor Party behind, I took it.

In the flurry of media speculation about the politics of 2004, the personal side of my experience has never been presented. I kept it to myself, my family and my diary. As the year progressed, the diary became an important outlet for recording the irreconcilable tension between work and family life. The lesson for those who write about political events is this: never underestimate the impact of private factors and emotions on public figures. When confronted by a choice between realising my political ambitions and

meeting my personal responsibility to those I love and care for, I chose the latter.

Throughout this hectic period, I maintained a regular series of diary entries except during the election campaign. This was a time-management issue: I was too busy studying policy documents at night and preparing for the next day's campaign to write up detailed diary material. I did, however, keep notes, and as soon as the campaign ended, I recorded lengthy entries dealing with this major event. I had a clear and vivid recollection of what had just occurred, so I felt comfortable with this process. Readers will find this campaign record in mid-October.

Sunday, 4 January

The end of my break, not that I relaxed too much. Spent my holiday thinking of ways to beat Howard. The excitement of getting this job has abated. Now it's down to the nervous reality of wondering if I can do it well, if I can handle an election year.

It's a huge task. We have spent two years arguing about the leadership instead of working on policy and fighting the Libs full on. There are six things I'll need to do to get the Party back on its feet:

- answer the Walsh dilemma. We need to develop a strong and appealing identity for modern Labor. That's the Ladder of Opportunity—the powerful combination of hard work, good families and communities, and the civilising role of government. I've got to energise the Labor movement after the bad experiences with flip-flop Beazley and Crean destabilisation
- unify the Party, try to put Humpty Dumpty back together again. My offers to Smith and Beazley have eased the tension. I want to bring Carmen back to the frontbench, providing this refugee thing goes okay at the National Conference. I can't afford to be rolled by the Left, allowing them to water down our policy. So many grievances and rivalries inside our show; managing them will be the hardest part of the job
- get us back into the values debate. Policy releases are important, not just for their technical detail, but for the values they convey to the electorate. Everything I put out must be underpinned by the right kind of Labor values: opportunity for all, aspiration and social mobility, mutual responsibility (hard work), community-building (mutualism) and public participation (reinventing democracy)
- emphasise our credentials on service delivery, remind the electorate that we're the party of good schools, good health services, practical

things that make a positive difference in people's lives. No more looking at policy as an abstract exercise in ideological correctness

- overcome Howard's wedge, and anticipate any new wedge issues he may throw at us. No more crouching in the grass. Plus redefine the symbolic issues of the Left in terms of traditional Labor values. We want the children out of detention centres, not because of UN Conventions, but because we care for children, and they deserve a better life. We want to say sorry to the Stolen Generations, not because of indigenous rights, but because of family values. We want to treat same-sex couples fairly, not because of their sexuality, but because they love and care for each other. It's about good values
- wrong-foot Howard by raising new issues, setting the agenda. It'll be up to me to do it. He had a fix on Beazley and Crean—he knew where they were coming from. My values and policy priorities are different. He's never heard a Labor Leader talk about democratic reform, community-building and mutual responsibility. I'll need to test him in the first week of Parliament by attacking the Club—put forward the abolition of the rorted superannuation scheme. It's a time bomb in his lap.

Saw the enemy today in the Trust Box at the SCG for Australia versus India, Steve Waugh's last test. Howard looked constipated as usual—he always has that worried look on his face. His wife, however, seems a nice lady. She gets a bum rap in the media, from what I saw today. Friendly, motherly—why do our people complain about her all the time? I like to take people as I find them.

I had a burst of guest commentary on ABC Radio, organised by Faulkner. It's the world's best job: great view of the ground, chat away about the game, food and grog laid on, and you get paid for it. In my next life I want to come back as the Skull, Kerry O'Keeffe.

The Trust Box is a hoot, presided over by Lord Rodney Cavalier. He attacks the Federal ALP and the corrupt patronage of the factions, but never says boo about State Labor. It's not hard to see why: Carr has given him this sinecure at the cricket, one of the plum jobs inside the system. And he loves to lord it over the assembled guests: a combination of exporting heroes, business donors and political hangers-on, all enjoying the largesse with their nosebags on.

Cavalier is Labor in theory but elitist in practice—a modern Labor trend, common in the likes of Carr, Jones, Evans and Rudd. Give me

Curtin/Chifley-style austerity any day. In fact, give me the SCG Hill any day: a much better day last year tarry-hooting with the Bulls. Better cricket and better company.

Wednesday, 7 January

I moved into my new office in Parliament House yesterday. Since the building opened, it has been occupied by Howard, Peacock, Hewson, Downer, Howard (again), Beazley and Crean—just one happy story out of seven. I said to the staff that the whole purpose of moving into this office is to get out as quickly as possible.

Pulled together my inner circle today for a planning meeting: Gartrell, Faulkner and Brereton, plus senior staff. The Shadow Ministry is too big to get things done, so I need this group as a sounding board. They were warned that all our discussions must be kept confidential; the first time it leaks is the last time it meets. I gave them my strategic agenda:

- The positive candidate always wins. The electorate doesn't hate Howard, so negativity will not work. We need to add value to the debate, encourage people to move past Howard to a better way of running the country. Push the need for generational change.
- The new generation candidate needs to move the agenda forward; campaigns work best when they use ideas to advance the thinking of the electorate. So I have to get off the blocks with a flurry of policy announcements.
- Pursue the politics of personal connection—triangulate beyond Left and Right, using values and instincts to make personal connections with the electorate. My bible is a great article by David Winston in *Policy Review* (June 1999): 'Triangulation is not an exercise in claiming the ideological middle ground. It is a strategy that rejects ideological points of view altogether, concentrating instead on making a connection with people'. Like Clinton in 1992: a caring populist.
- We need mobility: we have to shift the agenda to our social policy strengths and get out of Howard's firing line on the economy and national security. If we campaign on his strengths we will get a Crean-like result.
- Use policies/issues as a way of conveying values. The logic of my approach is this: values—problems—solutions (in the national interest).

That's the strategy, my best thinking for beating Howard. There are six themes that go with it:

- the Ladder of Opportunity, conveying values of opportunity, responsibility and hard work
- a Big Country: Labor as the party of the fair go that reaches out to people. We are the enlargers of public life, the true patriots. We must communicate the rights agenda in terms of traditional Labor values
- the Economy: prosperity with a sound social purpose. A Labor government will do more to create/maintain our prosperity, and create a second generation of economic reform. Plus fiscal responsibility: get our savings cycle ahead of our spending cycle, with all policies fully costed and fully funded. I want a bigger budget surplus than the Government
- National Security: standing up for Australia, putting the safety of our people first, unlike Howard's adventurism overseas. A defence-of-Australia strategy
- Community: work to solve social problems. Conveying values of trust, solidarity and cooperation—Australians sticking together. New issues that Howard hasn't thought about
- the New Politics: openness, public participation, ethics, standards. Labor is for the people, not the powerful. Campaign as an outsider against the insiders' Club in Canberra.

The meeting had no problems with any of that. They looked relieved that I had a plan. In fact, that the Party has a Leader who actually plans ahead. Beazley just meandered along while Simon buried himself in detail and process. We agreed that the best way of handling the next four months, up to the Budget, is to think about it as two different phases:

- from January to the end of the first sitting fortnight (22 February)—milk any honeymoon effect, and the burst of media coverage, plus release policies in each of the six thematic areas to show my values/instincts to the public. A flurry of activity built around the National Conference
- from 22 February till the Budget (11 May)—consolidate on phase one, building a steady and competent profile, showing people I am up to the job. Set the agenda and then ease back, bedding down the policy announcements.

Sunday, 1 February

How good is this? A magnificent Sydney Sunday, strolling through Darling Harbour with Janine and the boys, the *Sun Herald* headlining 'Book Mark' on its front page, a successful ALP National Conference behind me. So far, it's been too easy. Things are going 95 per cent to plan; only a couple of hiccups.

Easy media coverage for re-announcing policies in January: BAS simplification, childhood obesity, an Australian coastguard (a cop on the beat), Medicare teams to save bulk billing and the responsibilities of citizenship on Australia Day. When Simon first announced this stuff, nobody noticed. I put them out during a quiet time and they led the news. Money for jam.

The Conference started on Thursday with my opening address. Nervous all morning; calmed myself by thinking about Ollie and his *Lion King* characters. The speech rolled out my Third Way themes: a positive party, opportunity matched by responsibility, responsive and flexible service delivery, rebuilding social capital, opening up our democracy, and economic policies based on competition, incentive and budget savings. A good summary of my work over the past five years.

Another olive branch to those who were bagging me: I announced Tanner's new role as the Shadow Minister for Community Relationships. I want him to lead the charge on social capital, find new solutions to the problems of loneliness, work stress and community breakdown, starting with a national mentoring program. The next step is to bring back Carmen and put her in charge of the reinventing democracy agenda. It's worked inside the Party: our first directly elected National President. So it can work more generally in the parliamentary system.

Good policy announcements the other two days of Conference: a national dental program and a national reading program, early childhood education as the foundation of lifelong learning. That's today's newspaper headline: 'Book Mark', sensational stuff. Cameo appearances by Neville Smith (mentoring) and Mem Fox (reading aloud) to reinforce our policy themes. It's hard to believe—we are still shaking our heads—but I was the *Lion King* of this show.

The Party even handled the refugee debate okay, the Left doing what it does best: going through the motions of defeat. I announced a new policy position ahead of the Conference last Friday week—a tougher stance on people smugglers, but a softer stance on TPVs. We caught Howard on the hop and he was slow to attack it. It also took the sting out of

the Conference debate. An important lesson: try to do the unorthodox with Howard—he's in the groove, expecting old Labor stoushes and policies. I've got a dozen things in my kitbag that can surprise him.

So, what about the hiccups? It's never too hard to guess who's trying to spike my success:

- Roozendaal leaked my announcement on banning donations to the Party from Big Tobacco, dulling its impact on the first day of the Conference. He will never change: more interested in donations to the Party than Labor values
- Carr bullshitted to the media, saying that his Government had not been consulted about the new policy on Sydney's second airport—sending it to the Southern Highlands. We had extensive talks with Knowles and his office; they helped us define the study area for the new site. Craig tells me Bob knew about this but is just being Bob, making trouble for me. His DNA is programmed for revenge, even at the start of a Federal election year
- One of the business lobby groups in Canberra played computer games with its copy of my opening speech, decoding the various drafts and changes to it, and then gave them to Costello's office. Sloppy staff work at our end, it was sent out in the wrong format. No lasting harm from Costello's quasi-attack, just a nuisance distraction. But a sign of where these business groups line up: acting as research assistants and agents of the Liberal Party. One for the memory bank.

Friday, 6 February

Has my easy run come to an end? I'm sitting in the lounge of Coolangatta Airport (plane delayed) watching the usually unflappable Faulkner get worked up about a political problem. He's on the phone to Lincoln Wright from News Limited trying to talk down the significance of the Liverpool preselection. Wright is investigating it for an exposé in the Sunday papers, based on material fed to him by some of the old enemies inside the Party. One of those horrible moments in politics when your fate is entirely in the hands of others.

Fifteen years ago when it happened, John wanted to fry me politically. It was a classic Left versus Right factional stoush, and he was leading the charge for the Left. Now he's doing the right thing, blaming everything on Head Office. He says that 'I'm doing everything I can to keep this quiet'. At last, he's on my side of the controversy. I can't remember the details, it is so long ago, but John seems to know the story chapter and verse. Machine politics at work in the late 1980s.

Faulkner is so anxious, almost obsessive, that I'm starting to shit myself. He says he doesn't think Wright could be so dumb as to miss the significance of this. I was the beneficiary of the Head Office rorts, with dozens of Party members rubbed out of the ballot. Some big Labor names were involved, people who have gone on to be Federal and State front-benchers, making it a pretty big story now that I'm Leader of the Party. That's why the enemies have leaked it. I had a feeling that things were going too well, that something had to go wrong. This is it.

Sunday, 8 February

Massive relief. It's unbelievable: Lincoln Wright has concentrated on the same old rubbish from the big-noter Frank Heyhoe, relegating the Liverpool preselection to a secondary issue in his story. How good is that? There must be a god and he votes Labor. The journalist's name is not Lincoln Wright, it's Lincoln Wrong. Now I can think clearly again.

Last week looks so much better. We did a bus trip from the Central Coast to Tweed Heads, via Tamworth and Lismore. Three excellent community forums, attendances of around 500 at each—democracy in the raw. Good media coverage, especially compared with Howard's bumbling efforts in Perth, the Seniors' Tour.

Lismore was the highlight. Tony Wright turned up, looking very relaxed and comfortable, boasting about his visit to Nimbin. What's with that guy? He's a social Leftie who idolises Howard. After dinner I dropped in at the local pub, only to be confronted by a mad Indian chief who presented me with a leather scrotum bag. He said he wanted to put my remaining testicle in it. The pub security kept an eye on him while I got out of there. The world has gone mad and I'm in the middle of it, freaked out by Wright, Wrong and Sitting Bull. The whole thing is so crazy all I can do is laugh.

Back in Canberra tonight. Parliament starts on Tuesday. I'm going to roll this parliamentary super bomb down the aisle and watch the Club panic. Crean and Sherry were going to do it last year—close the scheme to new entrants and put new MPs on the community standard—but then Simon got pole-axed. They are still onside, along with Macklin, Faulkner and Danger, so I've got some good back-up to fight the Entitlements Club.

Earlier today Conroy told me that 'This will be a disaster politically. It won't work for you. In fact, it will rebound on the Party'. What planet is that guy from? First he wrecks Beazley's Budget Reply by saying tax increases are on the agenda. Then he tries to convince Crean to support the war in Iraq. Now he's telling me that attacking Public Enemy Number One, the parliamentary super scheme, will be a disaster.