Can Kevin kick the command culture?

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"No single nation can afford to risk its future on the infallibility of one man." John Curtin.

"One man and a dozen fools would govern better than one wise man alone." Ben Chifley

Introduction

Welcome. I am going to use this plenary to raise some questions about contemporary leadership and the study of leadership. It will be a PowerPoint free zone, so let me start by flagging the principal questions I'll be concerned with, which are:

- Why do leaders go 'too far'?
- Was John Howard a special case? (What drove the 'command culture'?)
- When do leaders' beliefs trump evidence? Insights from political religion.
- Will Rudd overturn the cult of leadership?

Part of my research agenda for nearly thirty years, but *only* part, has been political leadership. Despite prolonged pursuit of other interests – studies of advisers, the history of ideas, biography, institutional change, Australian studies – I am intermittently drawn back to this field. What provokes me to revisit it is the discrepancy between the media treatment and popular understandings of politics (which might lead you to believe politics is all about leadership), and the relative silence of Australian social scientists (for whom, with the exception of business faculties, leadership is a marginal interest)[i]. This has remained the case despite some outstanding studies of individual leaders at work: Pat Weller on Malcolm Fraser, or Judy Brett on Robert Menzies, for example; and some significant contributions to theory, such as John Kane on moral capital and Graham Little on leaders and their 'political ensembles'.

Of course this is partly to do with the conventions of social science itself: its rejection of the 19th century emphasis on 'the great man' thesis of history; its emphasis on testable

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[i] Here is a striking instance: there are 180 papers listed for this conference—apart from this address only two are designated as dealing with leadership.

propositions about institutional and social patterns working against more individualising approaches; its preference for surveying collective behaviour as against the notoriously difficult challenge of explaining singularity.

In Australia, it is given extra impetus by our history as a settler society. Colonial immigrant populations, preoccupied with establishing a foothold in the new land, developed a utilitarian, secular and positivist bent, in which all relations—especially political relations—were seen as instrumental. Later waves of settlers followed their lead. There is a stress on the public and the political, with building institutions, with the transfer and adaptation of ideas from elsewhere and with the progress of economies. Such themes informed many of the most important analyses of the emerging polity: Hancock and Eggleston on the state as a vast utility; Davies on the Australian 'talent for bureaucracy'; Butlin on colonial capitalism; Collins on our 'Benthamite society'; Castles on wage earners' welfare; Davison on 'the invisible state'. Which of these, however, talks of leadership? I'd argue that the preoccupation with institutions, perhaps even a 'talent for bureaucracy', has left us peculiarly blind to '… the indispensability of *leadership* in social life and in every major form of social organization' (Hook, 1943).

This is beginning to change. Studies of leadership effects on voting behaviour by Ian McAllister, Clive Bean and others have drawn attention back to the importance of leaders as a focus for aggregating opinion. John Kane and Haig Patapan have initiated studies of leadership and democratisation. Pat Weller, Rod Rhodes and more recently Paul 't Hart have contributed significantly to the ethnography of political elites. Lately Paul 't Hart and John Uhr have initiated a series on public leadership. Serious, comprehensive and (in some cases) theoretically informed biographies are making inroads against the campaign dross and journalism that once dominated our political biography. Biography is thriving. Are we, though, moving fast enough in a context where leader-centric politics has gained such a purchase that the institutions that once constrained overweening behaviour are eroding? Are we attentive enough to the *dangers* of leadership?

I'd suggest not. The predicament of the hapless Brendan Nelson in early 2008, and the overt and covert challenges generated by Malcolm Turnbull's ambitions, seemed to be the only bases for discussion of how the Liberal Party might recover its fortunes, as if the leader alone was what mattered. Equally, the dire straits of the state Liberal organizations were sheeted home to leaders: in Victoria, for example, the squalid campaign to unseat Ted Baillieu was seen by its backers as a rational response to the party's failings. Leadership overshadowed the rebuilding of

party organisations, reinvigorating branches, recruiting high quality candidates, and strategies to develop policies that address current problems while having a coherent philosophical rationale. Nor did recognition that parties can no longer assume the support of mass constituencies but must connect with diverse social groups, and that devolution to community organisations might be one response to 'wicked' policy problems, gain significant attention. Or, to put it another way, all of the above were seen as hinging on, as the responsibilities of, the leader. Above all, the failure to register that a surrender to 'heroic' leadership, under John Howard, was precisely what had brought the Liberal Party to this state was marginalised. The question of the day is, will the federal Labor government promise improvement? In 2007, the ALP was, as a campaigning tactic, recast as Kevin's party. In government, exercises that appeared to promise attention to many voices, and canvassing of ideas from all sectors of the community, such as the 2020 summit, already look like a dialogue of elites, and were represented, again, as being all about Kevin. Bob Carr has recently reminded us that the ALP has always been divided between an ethos of working for the common good, and a 'cult of leadership'. This is a question to which I will return.

Why do leaders go 'too far'?

Let me first expand on an overriding issue: my concern is with the conditions that encourage political leaders to 'go too far', that is, to over-ride the constraints that not only reinforce democracy by diffusing power, but also that contribute to good policy-making by enforcing recurrent reality checks (Walter 2006). Democracy is premised upon avoidance of leadership dominance. It assumes that individuals will be driven by self-interest and that elites will emerge, but the demos will be protected by countering power with power—the checks and balances of countervailing institutions. John Uhr's concept of 'the lattice of leadership' is a useful gloss on this point — leadership diffused *across* institutional spheres, but constrained to work collectively for the common good, with each élite challenged to do its best by being held to account by leaders in another sphere (Uhr 2005, pp. 78-81). When one element becomes too dominant, the ethical constraint of the lattice breaks down. The counterpoint is that when power is allowed to aggregate, democracy is threatened.

When this happens, part of the story is usually about the proclivities within leaders themselves, but part, too, is about the historical, sociological and cultural changes that have eroded the institutional barriers to leadership caprice. Of course, this is part of a wider debate

about the consolidation of executive power, sometimes discussed in terms of 'presidentialization' (Poguntke & Webb 2005). Nor is the personalization of politics around leaders without parallels elsewhere: it is much discussed, for instance, in the literature on Tony Blair (Coates & Krieger 2004, Hennessy 2005, Kampfner 2003). Yet both institutional factors and the proclivities of individual leaders endow every instance with uniqueness, and my argument is that the Australian case has not been closely enough studied.

One of the unique factors in the Australian instance has been the recent dominance – until 2007 – of John Howard. Indeed, many of those who alerted us to the problematic nature of Howard's dominance seemed to assume that with Howard's demise most problems would disappear. Yet, as Paul Strangio and I argue in a recent book, *No, prime minister* (Walter & Strangio 2007), the underlying trend towards executive consolidation long predates Howard, the phenomenon is much more widespread and it will continue. The end of his government prompts the question: does a new government foreshadow a new approach? I will argue: not necessarily.

Many have noted the tendency towards the aggregation of executive power. John Uhr himself provides a valuable chapter on national security initiatives as a war *against* ethics and an assault on 'the lattice of leadership' (Uhr 2005, chapter 7). Ian McAllister has carefully plotted the trends accentuating prime ministerial leadership, while noting that particular personalities tend to accelerate or to contain those trends (McAllister 2008). Even advocates of democratic elitism, such as John Higley, warn that consensus on the rules of the game is breaking down with elite fragmentation and systematic enmity based on 'more tightly organised and mutually antagonistic camps' (Higley & Burton 2006). Jenny Hocking provocatively claims that we are witnessing the emergence of post-democratic leadership, with closed and secretive decision-making depending on an assertion that contemporary government is dealing with matters of such moment and urgency that an elision conflating its interests with those of the state can be taken for granted, at the expense of community consultation, parliamentary oversight and judicial review (Hocking 2005). At the national level, this also justifies over-riding federal devolution and local government.

What Strangio and I illustrated was that such arguments can be related to long run institutional changes in our political system. These include the conduct of prime ministers over at least the past three decades; reforms to the public service to make the bureaucracy more responsive to incumbent governments (with the centralization of policy co-ordination and

authority in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and through it the prime minister); the development of dense and highly centralised political advisory structures; the evolution of media conventions that draw attention to leaders and the 'story' of personality conflicts rather than to policy debate; and the hollowing out of political parties which once acted as a brake on politicians, including leaders (Walter & Strangio 2007).

The dynamic is illuminated in the patterns of decision making relating to the commitment to war, and the response to terrorism, as Uhr (2005), Hocking (2005), Walter (2006)—and many others—have argued. It is not surprising that, for decision-makers, crisis situations provoke concern with the security of information, inhibit open communication, reinforce 'inner circle' interaction and are conducive to 'groupthink'—it is for these reasons that war and foreign policy are favoured by theorists such as Irving Janis (1982) and Graeme Allison (1971). Recently, others (e.g., Preston & 't Hart 1999) have shown the broader potential for groupthink, where the leader's needs demonstrably affect the organization and operation of advisory systems in bureaucratic politics. Taking this lead, Strangio and I concentrated on domestic policy making, arguing that with the erosion of institutional constraints, leader-centric policy making has become more and more the norm across the policy terrain, and not just in relation to war, terrorism and foreign policy.

Was John Howard a special case? (What drove the 'command culture'?)

In broad terms, this might be seen as an incremental progression in the case of the Howard government. Howard did not, in the main, by-pass cabinet. He was both committed to and respectful of cabinet government (Weller 2007, chapter 10); he listened to colleagues and exerted discipline effectively, but cabinet became an instrument of his dominance (Kelly 2005). Yet what was once the exception, when Howard by-passed cabinet to work with a small inner circle—such as in the 'exceptional' circumstance of the 'children overboard affair' (Weller 2002), or the secretive decision-making surrounding the Iraq commitment (Walter 2006)—became increasingly the tactic of choice the longer he was in power.

The syndrome was particularly evident in 2007, when there was what amounted to a year-long election campaign. In the theatre of campaigning, politicians' minds were concentrated by the battle for power, and suddenly social problems of lengthy duration were starkly revealed as

now being urgent, and so challenging that only an experienced government (the coalition) could manage, or that only 'new leadership' (Labor) could break through.

Dramatic responses in such cases have revealed a style of decision-making that should concern us. Initiatives were driven by leaders (to the detriment of community consultation); tactics were fundamentally illiberal (the urgency of action used as a licence too break down the 'normal' checks and balances); and the strategy was essentially undemocratic (as power aggregated at the top).

The characteristic pattern was to transform a matter that might normally be seen as subject to routine processes of policy deliberation into a crisis, giving discretion to the leader to over-ride the usual (democratic) provisions (cf. Marrs 2001, p. 25) , and incidentally legitimating extreme centralization of decision making ('t Hart, Rosenthal & Kouzmin 1993; Kouzmin 2008) . Thus, a number of crises were identified—social breakdown in Indigenous communities, the states' administration of hospitals, water management, for instance—and it was argued that only central government intervention and strong leadership could serve as the circuit breaker. The government would make a forceful statement (such as, 'the army will arrive next week') in advance of community consultation. Labor occasionally engaged in its own pre-emption, trying to second guess government intentions, and announcing its position—usually no less top-down, no less leader-centric—in advance of government action.

Other authorities (local and state governments especially) were over-ridden or attacked as barriers to the resolution of national problems. Liberal institutions (the federal devolution of power, parliamentary scrutiny, the courts), whose purpose is to guard against capricious government, were diminished. There was a devaluation of local knowledge and of the wisdom of those with hands-on experience of those areas the policy community now determined to take over. And despite rhetorical gestures towards community engagement, there was rarely commitment to co-operative management regimes.

In many respects, the way policy was developed in the case of the NT intervention—to take one of the most arresting instances—seems perversely as if modelled on the case studies of what produces policy fiasco (Janis 1982; Preston & 't Hart 1999). Decisions were made in haste by a small inner circle, on the advice of Mal Brough, who was described as a Minister who 'talks, but does not listen'. Routine practices of inter-departmental policy consultation were abandoned in the interests of speed. There was no provision for robust debate about alternatives—nor is it

clear that expert advice (from economists, medical anthropologists, health professionals, social workers) was sought. Such practices are commonly thought to encourage 'groupthink'. Once legislation was developed, it was pushed through parliament at speed, making nonsense of the notion of appropriate legislative scrutiny. The explicit concerns of the authors of the 'Little Children are Sacred' report, which was the catalyst for intervention, were overlooked. Breaking the cycle seemed to be seen as an end in itself, so there was no apparent thought about the post-intervention phase. Community leaders were defined by Howard in one interview as 'part of the problem' and so there was no effective community engagement. Yet without such engagement, there was no prospect of building community capacity or responsibility.

Several commentators evoked an Iraq parallel by referring to the 'shock and awe' blitz at the core of the government's approach (e.g., Grattan & Chandler 2007). Pat Dodson made the connection explicit: 'This is an Iraq style of intervention with no exit strategy or plans for long-term economic and social development' (Dodson 2007). Indeed, just as the invasion of Iraq was premised on the fallacious notion that overthrowing a dictator would unleash the forces of 'freedom' and democracy would follow, the NT intervention seemed to hinge on equally unfounded assumptions that rules and regulations alone (without attention to the dynamics of dysfunction) would change behaviour and that breaking down the impediments (customary law, collective ownership, etc.) between remote communities and the 'mainstream' would encourage Indigenous people to integrate into the national economy. Given the Howard government's defeat, we can only speculate about how management of the NT intervention would have progressed, but it is probable that the failure of community engagement would have subverted the capacity building that could be the only foundation for a long-term plan and a viable economy. This missing element—community engagement—appears now to be the principal task of Jenny Macklin and the Rudd Labor government.

As suggested earlier, the NT intervention is far from the only instance where a command culture appeared to operate. I have written elsewhere about 'groupthink' and the Iraq commitment (Walter 2006). Strangio and I have drawn attention to further instances, such as Howard's unilateral commitment to the US Joint Strike Fighter program, the bypassing of Cabinet on the decision not to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, and the Murray Darling Plan developed without reference to Cabinet or relevant departments (Walter & Strangio 2007).We also now know that Howard dismissed concerns some ministers raised about WorkChoices, and

marginalised alternative viewpoints within government circles on global warming, blocking proposals for investigating carbon trading schemes in the late 1990s and 2003. As Strangio and I have argued, the trend towards leadership centrality predates Howard. But his practices were integral to the evolution of a command culture in domestic policy making, and the increasing resort to crisis techniques indicated it was becoming routinized rather than emerging only in exceptional cases. In fact, the style of leadership this encourages is good for one purpose only: combat. Yet, as one US army researcher observed, '…a command culture, indispensable in combat, is an impediment to open discussion of fundamental issues at all levels…' In other words, not only does it undermine 'the lattice of leadership', but it is also a style that is inimical to good policy making.

When do leaders' beliefs trump evidence? Insights from political religion.

The link between what I've come to call the command culture and belief-based, rather than evidence-based, decision-making directs attention to another body of contemporary analysis that draws on the concept of political religion. Focusing on the clash of faith based fundamentalisms, not only those making explicitly theological claims (such as radical Islam, or the Christian right), but also those professing to be entirely secular (such as neo-liberalism), current debates about political religion touch on leadership only in passing. Yet the precursors, such as Eric Voegelin and Emilio Gentile, who were engaged in explaining the rise of national socialism (in Voegelin's case, in 1938, on the eve of fleeing Germany), were acutely conscious that 'the leader principle' was at the core of political religion.

Voegelin's thesis was that the separation of church and state, with the Enlightenment commitment to secularization, and its liberal critique of religion, had been fundamentally misconceived because it ignored the human drive to find meaning. Denial of the sacred, in effect, forced it underground – only to re-emerge in the 'sacralization of the collectivity', that culminated in modern political religions (cf Burrin, 1997: 1). As Voegelin later summarized his case:

> The liberal attack was directed against dogmatism and the authority of revelation. If only these influences on thinking and public life could be removed, then the free human being would order society rationally with his autonomous reason. However, if in practice Christianity is successfully driven out of men, they become not rational liberals but

> ideologues. The undesirable spiritual order is replaced not by liberalism but rather by one or the other of the emotionally as intensive ideologies. (Voegelin et al, 1974: 517).

Modern political religions – communism, fascism, national socialism – were the inevitable product. And at their heart were leaders who served as the incarnation of political community, imposed an exclusive faith and acted as interpreters of collective destiny, now couched in the unassailable language of science (cf. Burrin, 1997: 1). For my purposes, Voegelin's contribution is important in illuminating a structure of thinking; one in which a certain set of ideas is beyond question and both the governing ideology and the centrality of the leader 'are reducible to an "existential core of faith"' (Shorten, 2007: 180).

John Gray, in his recent, spirited polemic, *Black Mass* (Gray, 2007), has run with these concepts, identifying not only radical Islam but also neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism as faith-based structures of thought. He attempts to show what happens to societies that commit to the TINA ('There is no alternative') principle[ii], and the ruin that leaders committed to belief rather than realism can engender. Like Voegelin (to whom he pays little attention), Gray believes that the Enlightenment suppression of religion, in the interests of a 'secular monolith', denies the need for narratives of meaning, which find their outlet in unexpected and even more dangerous fundamentalisms. Among the most perverse of these, he argues, is the utopian Enlightenment belief in progress, in the service of which extreme violence and destructive wars have been unleashed (and which, in reaction, Islamic extremists have mirrored).

I'm not entirely persuaded of the core thesis here. It may be true, as GK Chesterton is alleged to have observed in the 1920s, that 'when people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing—they believe in anything'[iii], but where's the evidence? Don't mistake me: thirty years of interviewing political activists has convinced me that beliefs matter, that even the most power-oriented among them are committed to some set of principles that explains (not least,

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[ii] One challenge to my argument here has been the assertion that the commitment to Keynesian economics in the post-war period was as all encompassing as has been the commitment to neo-liberalism in the recent past. I disagree. For one thing, I suggest that, despite the dominance of the Keynesian paradigm, there was more latitude in the interpretation of the business-government relationship in the 1940s than has been evident in the period of neo-liberalism (see my argument concerning the debates over post-war reconstruction, Walter 1988, and on the 'monocausal' narrowness of neo-liberalism, Walter 1996). More importantly, there was a clearly recognised alternative throughout the 1940s-1980s: the spectre of the socialist command economies. Certainly, while represented as a threat (the 'communist menace'), this was nonetheless an incentive to maintain the 'ethical state' (Sawer 2003) as a counter to disquiet, and provided oxygen to radicals and dissidents as a philosophical resource for critique. Since the collapse of the command economies, no other 'alternative' world view has gained such purchase in the Western polities, and even mild social democracy has lost traction.

[iii] This is now widely thought to be a misattribution.

to themselves) why they do what they do. And it seems clear, too, that the more politically engaged they are, the more 'ideologically constrained' they will be, as Philip Converse (1964) demonstrated. Yet a commitment to the absolute authority of belief and to the leader as the font of interpretation and the incarnation of all that matters—for *most* of the period in which I've been an observer—has not been the dominant impression. What then has changed to allow leaders with more or less common or garden beliefs to give their opinions special status? For me, it is all to do with the unravelling of conventional restraints – the erosion of that 'lattice' of competing elites holding each other to account – rather than with the breakout of some core drive for meaning. That erosion has diminished the civic norms that ameliorated the organisation of systematic enmities and the reification of mutually antagonistic groups within political institutions. More importantly, it has removed the imperative for regular reality checks and for compromise. Without that imperative, the inevitable tendency of oligarchs (*pace* Michels 1911) to assume that they know best can flourish without hindrance.

One does not have to go all the way with Gray, then, to find some interesting insights in his analysis of contemporary leaders. Few, for instance, would suggest that Bush, Blair and Howard were similar personalities, had similar leadership styles, or used the levers of power in the same ways (compare, for instance, the very different approaches of Blair and Howard to cabinet government). Yet, following Gray, there are intriguing parallels in the way they make connections between their beliefs and decision processes, how this illuminates their immersion in the command culture—and the questions this raises about Rudd's capacity to renovate 'the cult of leadership' and the command culture itself.

While there was an overt religiosity with Blair (as perhaps with Rudd?) that Howard did not so openly share, there are telling similarities. Blair, according to Gray, carried on Thatcher's work in Britain because he shared the TINA syndrome—the belief that market liberalization was the inevitable accompaniment to global progress and the spread of democracy. Given the resistance of old style social democrats, power had to be concentrated before anything else could be done: the restructuring of Blair's party as a centralized institution and the destruction of outmoded 'labourist' traditions was the consequence. Without a broad philosophy other than what Blair represented, there was no measure against which his party could hold him to account. Compare Howard's 'torching' of the Menzies tradition, reinterpretation of liberalism and renovation of the Liberal Party around his leadership (Walter and Strangio, 2007: chapter 1).

Blair never faltered in his belief that all his efforts were directed to good ends, and that the values he promoted were representative of human progress (Gray, 2007: 101). For his part, Howard made the unlikely claim that every progressive measure since the 1940s originated in the Liberal Party (Howard, 1996), and prefaced his every policy announcement with a statement of how it linked with the core values of 'ordinary' Australians. Howard based his policy agenda on a commitment to the liberation of these 'ordinary' Australians, and a singular belief that liberation was achieved through maximising choice and that promotion of private enterprise was the means to realising choice. Bureaucracy would always be trumped by private enterprise: 'people motivated by high ideals, stirred by a sense of vocation, guided by local knowledge of their communities, and unashamedly desiring a reward if successful at their task, can help … better than a bureaucracy forced to work to rigid regulation' (Howard, 2000; 5). This justified sweeping changes in, for instance, health care, education funding, the outsourcing of service delivery—and was the rationale *not* for small government, but for an expansion of regulation and for substantial state investment to underwrite the necessary transition to private enterprise! Yet these were faith-based objectives: not only a product of current doctrine, but also at odds with historical analysis of how significant the role of the public sector had been in delivering relatively fair life chances in the post-war period (see, e.g., Brown, 1995; Walter 1999).

Gray comments on Blair's unshakeable sense of rectitude: 'it was enough that he felt he was right' (Gray, 2007: 99). Howard, too, was undaunted in his conviction—even after his regime was swept away—that what he did was right, perhaps developing, like Blair according to Gray, 'a sense [that] subjective certainty is all that is needed for an action to be right' (Gray, 2007: 101). This encouraged a resistance to alternative ways of thinking, a sense that opposition was always dangerous and perhaps malevolent, justifying extreme responses. In international relations this was, for Blair, Bush and Howard, the justification for resorting to force to ensure the triumph of the good, the trigger for commitment to ill-judged wars. If rectitude demanded one sort of action, and intelligence suggested another, then intelligence was disregarded. Good intentions were paramount, but '… "good intentions" were promoted through ill-conceived and ideologically motivated policies, whose distance from any prudent assessment of facts [Blair] seemed unable to perceive' (Gray 2007: 99). Truth, too, was reinterpreted: Gray says of Blair, 'For him truth is whatever serves the cause, and when he engages in what is commonly judged to be deceptive he is only anticipating the new world that he is helping to bring about' (Gray, 2007:

103-4). The habits of deception that is never conceded, of resort to plausible deniability, and of appeal to a higher cause when challenged, are all too familiar. If the case is most clearly established in relation to decisions to go to war, what I would now suggest—in relation to the cases I mentioned earlier, especially towards the end of Howard's term—is that such habits become routinized. Is it because faith and belief, both exercised by and invested in the leader, have come to seem natural features of secular politics that the command culture has been allowed to prevail—despite its anti-democratic features?

Of course, there is another aspect of the Howard story, and one his successors would do well to heed. While the trends I describe tell us much about the collapse of the parties into the leadership fallacy, the links between leaders and 'true-believers' and even the susceptibility of media elites to the leadership narrative, we are saved from the extremes of the command culture and of political religion by the scepticism of the public. They do not see 'the leader' as 'the incarnation of the people'. One might read the substantial gap between polls on the best prime-minister, and more general surveys of political satisfaction and engagement, from the late 1990s on, as evidence that people were willing to rate Howard the best *available* leader given the alternatives offered by Labor, while at the same time being unhappy with politics, politicians and some policy directions. That is not to say that we are protected from bad policy—driven by inward looking leadership groups—along the way. Still, there is some hope in that the final coincidence of quite evidently ideologically driven policy (in WorkChoices) and the appearance of a Labor leader the public could live with, sealed Howard's fate. But political elites remain in thrall: the parties have not learned the lesson of humility as is indicated by the fruitless search for a new messiah in the Liberal party; self appointed media kingmakers remain preoccupied with the leadership narrative, and what of the Rudd government itself?

Will Rudd overturn the cult of leadership?

And so to the question of the day: can a new government overthrow what is described here as a trend—albeit one given powerful impetus by the Howard government's practices and that became more entrenched the longer it held power? Evidently, changes to the machinery of government—enhanced parliamentary scrutiny, the imposition of restraint and accountability on ministerial staff, restoration of a degree of independence in the public service (Walter & Strangio 2007, chapter 4; Walter 2008)—would contribute to restoring the 'lattice of leadership', and the

Rudd government initially made promising moves on all of these fronts. Anne Tiernan has recently given us an encouraging account of the planning and purposefulness of the governmental transition though the first 6 months (Tiernan 2008). The appointment of Senator John Faulkner as Special Minister of State to oversee such reform was positive: he was, in opposition, a notable defender of Senate powers of inquiry to ensure proper scrutiny of government. (But, one recalls, Howard also made promises about opening up government on first assuming power, and it is now reported that Faulkner has been quietly marginalised by Rudd's office.) The Rudd team's search for alternative ideas provoked coalition derision during the 2007 election campaign (Peter Costello's dismissive comment—an exemplary statement of the command culture—was, 'A leader doesn't go to committees, a leader knows what he wants and announces it!'). Yet Rudd's tactics in broadening the scope of policy input (e.g., initiating the 2020 summit); committing to community engagement (the community cabinets); establishing inquiries on matters of community concern; and installing representatives of all points of view (e.g., appointing Howard's chief of staff and principal adviser, Arthur Sinodinis, to a review of Defence) all seem designed to broaden options, to step back from the leader principle and to hedge against the inner-circle thinking that leads to groupthink. Are these indicative of a return to policy debate, contestability and evidence, as opposed to the reliance on conviction and faith? Are they a decisive counter to the command culture?

The other side of the coin is that, on early indications, neither Labor nor Rudd are immune to what Bob Carr identified: the cult of leadership. The ALP projected 'Kevin 07' as the harbinger of 'new leadership', but tellingly the slogan was personalised and the party gave its fortunes into his hands as completely as it had in the disastrous Latham experiment. Rudd soon gave us a clue to what that might mean by single-handedly overriding Labor's organizational tradition, not with the goal of devolving authority but of centralising it in his hands. It was Rudd's avowedly 'Christian socialism' (Rudd, 2006) that seemed the only attempt to recast ALP ideals for the new tasks of government. Rudd was then represented as in some respect the author of all his government did in its first six months in office: as one journalist remarked, 'his fingerprints are on everything'. It was Rudd's drive and Rudd's work habits that set the tempo for his team and that drove the APS to breaking point by May 2008. The emblematic set-piece engagement with broader interests—the 2020 summit—was invented, and closely managed, by a tight inner circle. For all its laudable policy objectives—some of which may be realised—it was

projected as a revelation about Rudd's way of leading. Was it, finally, about shaking out 'a dozen good ideas'? Did those pictures of Rudd meeting, greeting, listening and mingling look like a leader reaching out—or someone spreading the loaves and fishes of his beneficence (his office?) among the deserving disciples, our 'best and brightest'?

Notwithstanding the ALP's expressed intention of addressing the problem of consolidated executive power, some have questioned Rudd's ability to do so: a former Foreign affairs colleague of Rudd, for instance, predicted he would be a 'nightmare, an obsessive who would micromanage everything' (*Age,* November 6, 2007, p. 6), and seasoned observers canvassed the indications that he would 'seize more power as pm' (Kelly 2007). Tiernan's positive account of the successful Rudd government transition acknowledges that his inability to step back may be a problem (Tiernan 2008). Now in power, the commentary on Rudd's predilection for micro-management, and tendency towards a controlling centralization, has become more detailed and more persuasive (Grattan 2008, Murphy 2008, Taylor 2007), especially when the honeymoon came to an end, cracks appeared in the leadership façade, and Rudd defended himself by savaging the APS. Lately, it has begun to seem that the endless garnering of ideas without decision might be the drive of an obsessive who feels that if he can command *all* the information, the right policy solutions will automatically present themselves. Yet, at this time, it remains an open question: is the mantra of Rudd's dominance solely a description of behaviour, or is it amplified by the media feeding on itself (and on an inclination to caste him as Howard in another guise)? Is Rudd clever enough to see the limitations of his penchant for control and to establish countervailing measures? Is he really intent on canvassing the broadest range of inputs and evidence before deciding on crucial issues? Or is he yet another 'steering by power chances' (Davies 1980, p. 5), driven by personal conviction and impenetrable rectitude (Gray 2007), and for whom the erosion of institutional constraints will prove an irresistible inducement to follow his star and exercise the command imperative, stalling democratic reform?

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