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CHAPTER 6

Australian Political Parties and Democracy: A Strange Case of Liberal Modernity

Marian Simms

INTRODUCTION

Australia is an interesting case when considering the role of parties in the promotion of democracy as it is one of a handful of former British “settler” colonies that developed modern democratic forms of governance and modern political parties relatively early by global standards. Australia was settled in 1788 by the British as a military outpost and became a depository for prisoners (convicts). It had autocratic governance under the British until pressures by locals led to the granting of a limited form of democratic self-governance in the early 1840s.

This chapter argues that it is impossible to understand contemporary democratic politics in Australia without understanding the colonial context; particularly as the six colonies that gave rise to the six states of the modern federation had separate histories, policies, and traditions that continued after federation in 1901. For example, in a divide similar to the dichotomy between “slave” and “free” states in the United States, most Australian colonies were marked by the stain of convictism, while others, notably South Australia, were deliberately established on principles of free settlement.¹ It is no accident that South Australia became known as “the paradise of dissent” and was therefore the first colony to introduce universal suffrage that included indigenous people and to provide a system of neutral and fair electoral administration that was eventually borrowed by the new Commonwealth of Australia after federation. Another division was between colonies composed of large Aboriginal populations—especially the geographically vast ones of Queensland and

Western Australia—and those with smaller indigenous populations. The former were implacably opposed to giving Aborigines equal civil and political rights.

Contemporary Australian political science texts define democracy in a relatively conventional sense of comprising the enshrinement of the principle of majority rule, based on free and fair elections, in which there is legal provision for equality of participation. However, these are best understood as “ideals,” for according to one of the most venerable reissued texts, “Australians only very imperfectly approximate these standards; but unless they maintain them as standards they are sapping and mining the foundations of their chosen system.”² More recent discussions of the “democratic deficit” have reflected a growing popularity of broader definitions of democracy to embrace cognate notions of democratic representation based on key groups such as women and indigenous and ethnic minorities³ and on the importance of democracy “within” political parties and other political organizations, rather than democracy “between” political parties in the classic Schumpeterian sense.⁴

It is argued here that political parties have played important roles in legislating for democracy, in debating democracy, and in providing “players” and often “infrastructure” to ensure elections are actively contested affairs. In often imperfect ways, electoral competition has ensured that problems and gaps in the system are emphasized. It will also be argued below that political parties have formed “constituent” roles, especially at the commonwealth level, in establishing the new electoral laws after federation. However, the Australian discussion—with few exceptions—has stopped short of considering the need for democratic principles to apply to the internal lives of political parties; hence this chapter will include a discussion of internal party democracy.

Australian parties have venerable histories, emerging before universal suffrage and in advance of industrialization. However, unlike the European parties of “notables,” they were often composed of self-styled “radicals” and “liberals” who had left poverty in the United Kingdom. Self-styled conservatives were rare in 19th-century Australian politics and were lampooned by the media.

The other components to the Australian story were the key institutions of social, industrial, and economic policy, such as the Arbitration Commission (1904) and later the Tariff Board (1921), which between them created a “new province” of social harmony and economic equity. These components were added after the debate over the Australian state and the Australian “settlement,” which is usually seen to comprise the early commitment to five policies: white Australia, industry protection, wage arbitration, state paternalism, and imperial benevolence.⁵ Although the Australian federation was arguably less cataclysmic than say its North American counterparts, the early postfederation governments had crucial foundational policy roles.

This institutional framework, which arguably lasted until the early 1970s, was the creature of party compromise, which, in turn, had been created by the federation. By its unrelenting use of the caucus system, the Australian Labor Party (ALP), which was in government, albeit in a minority capacity, by 1904, eventually forced a coalition between social and laissez-faire liberals in 1910.⁶ Therefore, social liberalism had a dominating role in Australian politics earlier than say in Great Britain. Crucially the role was continuing—with changing fortunes—whereas in Britain social liberalism was snuffed out by the forces of conservatism and a majoritarian electoral system. Thus the idea of the ALP as the party of “initiative” and the contemporary Liberal Party (and its predecessors) as the party of resistance has a long provenance and continues to appear, although in slightly different language.⁷

HISTORY AND CONTEXT

According to Hartz’s fragment theory, countries like Australia and New Zealand were born “modern,” and to a large extent this has been an accurate description of the electoral and party systems in both countries.⁸ Both systems were widely touted as progressive social laboratories, particularly at the turn of the 20th century. However, this chapter is also concerned with difference, in particular the differences between Australia, as a so-called new world system, and the Old World of Europe, which has provided many of the models and much of the language of politics and representation.

The broad outlines of the modern Australian party system were in place at the time of federation in 1901. The new Constitution enshrined the “democratic” values of Australia but deliberately left open the details of the electoral system of the new Commonwealth for the Parliament. What were those values? Australia and New Zealand were not simply “fragments” of the Old World but from the second half of the 1850s moved firmly toward the orderly transition to independence from the United Kingdom and then toward democracy, precisely because they were without the established political and economic elites of the Old World. Hartz has noted that “Australian radicalism . . . remains morally fixed at the point of its origin,” namely, the radicalism of Richard Cobbett,⁹ and English and Irish radicals, including “Tolpuddle Martyrs” and Chartists, who were transported as convicts to Australia in the mid-19th century.

The early achievement of men’s suffrage, the invention of the secret ballot (1856 in South Australia and Victoria), the establishment of effective labor parties (1890s), and then the achievement of female suffrage (1894 in South Australia and 1899 in Western Australia) all had been concluded by the time of federation. The impulses were partly those of classical liberalism, imported from England, but tempered by colonial experiences, such as the radical struggles of the Victorian goldfields.¹⁰

Under English common law, contrast was drawn between “settled” and “conquered” states. The former were defined as cases where the migrating population from Europe encountered no established population, colloquially; this could be termed vacant possession—the legal term was *Terra Nullius*. The latter were places that had established populations, which needed to be subdued or “conquered” before European settlement could take hold. The early adoption of the legal doctrine of *Terra Nullius* by the colonial Australian court system in the first half of the 19th century meant the effective denial of prior rights of the apparently nomadic indigenous Aboriginal people. This then gave the European settlers more or less free rein over the land.

In 1902, the year after federation and the establishment of the Australian nation, Australian white men and women aged 21 or older were granted the right to vote in the federal (national) elections. Aboriginal “natives” were specifically excluded unless they had through a quirk of fate already gained the right at the state level.¹¹ It is important to understand that the Australian political compact specifically excluded “coloured” people and the indigenous Aborigines. “Coloured” men were also excluded from being granted “miners” rights, without which they could not legally mine for gold or any other mineral or ore. In the early Australian colonies, miners rights were tantamount to political rights. From the outset, the democratic status of the new nation was compromised by the failure to grant indigenous Australians equal political rights. It was only in 2007 that an Australian prime minister, the recently elected ALP leader Kevin Rudd, formally apologized to Australian Aborigines for their social and political exclusion and the cruel wrongs committed against them.

Political parties appeared on the Australian political scene before federation in 1901 in the six colonies (Table 6.1). The ALP had emerged by the early 1890s, largely as a consequence of the failure of trade unions to win gains for their workers through lobbying and direct action. It gained political representation in the elections in the colony of New South Wales in 1891. Henry Parkes’ Free Traders, a radical antiprotection party, emerged in colonial parliamentary politics in the 1880s and was the forerunner of the modern Liberal Party of Australia (LPA).¹² In the colony of Victoria (dating from 1851), the Protection Party emerged under lawyer Alfred Deakin in the 1880s (see Table 6.1). Internal conflicts over economic policy have thus been a consistent feature of the LPA. Divisions over social policy have also surfaced from time to time: more progressive social liberals have regularly traced their heritage back to Deakin and are often referred to as Deakinite Liberals.

Australian parties were among the earliest of modern political parties, defined as incorporating a parliamentary presence, a platform or doctrine, and most notably an organized force. Peter Loveday and Alan Martin have convincingly argued that the Free Trade and Liberal Association of New South Wales and the Protection Union of New South

Table 6.1 Formation of Important Political Organizations

<i>Date</i>	<i>Political organization</i>
1889	Fretrade and Liberal Association Protectionist Union
1891	Labor Party
1894	Farmers' and Settlers' Associations
1916	Nationalist Party
1918	Country Party
1932	United Australia Party
1944–1945	Liberal Party
1977	Australian Democrats
1992	Australian Greens

Wales both met these criteria by 1889.¹³ There is, equally, general agreement that modern parties in most industrial societies only came into widespread international existence in the years after World War II. In this sense, as in many others, there is further evidence that Australia was “born modern.”

In Europe, modern parties tended to emerge as suffrage expanded, so the relatively early advent of white adult male suffrage had meant the relatively early emergence of modern parties. Max Weber has classically referred to this process as the advent of “plebiscitary democracy.”¹⁴ Under this model, modern parties provide the “managerial pattern” and develop on the basis of earlier stages, including “aristocratic cliques” and groups of political “notables.”

Maurice Duverger developed a more extended typology of modern parties based on Weber’s analysis.¹⁵ His fundamental distinction was between interior and exterior parties: the former are parties whereby the impetus springs from the parliamentarians themselves, who are involved in the creation of organizations to ensure their election and reelection. With the competitive pressure of an expanded electorate, the interior “parliamentary” parties are forced to adopt some of the characteristics of the exterior ones. Both are best understood as components of a party system. This contrast is usually made with exterior parties formed by the pressure of groups outside the parliament and lacking representation within to gain access to political power. The two early Australian political parties, from the broadly defined center-right—the free traders and the protectionists—are classic examples of so-called interior parties (sometimes called parties of notables or bourgeois parties).

In Australia, the two examples of exterior parties are the Labor Party and the Country/National Party. The ALP first emerged in New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland in 1891. In NSW, it grew out of the Trades and Labor Council of New South Wales (founded in 1871) and originally ran candidates under the banner of the Labor Electoral

Leagues. Its early platforms committed the party to various forms of socialism, including nationalization of banking and provision of universal welfare for the aged. The NSW Country Party had an early commitment to agrarian socialism, and it was not unusual for members of parliament to move from one party to the other.

The early arrival of two exterior parties would have two significant repercussions for the nascent political culture. First, it meant the development of a new theory and practice of party democracy based on extra-parliamentary control and caucus solidarity.¹⁶ Elected parliamentarians were representatives of their party branches and the affiliated trade unions. To put it bluntly, members of parliament would lose party endorsement if they failed to vote for collectively agreed-upon policies. Over time most issues were defined as core party policy, providing little room for any degree of political independence. Second, it meant that affiliated organizations played, and still continue to play, crucial roles in the organizational lives of such parties, especially in processes like the selection of candidates.

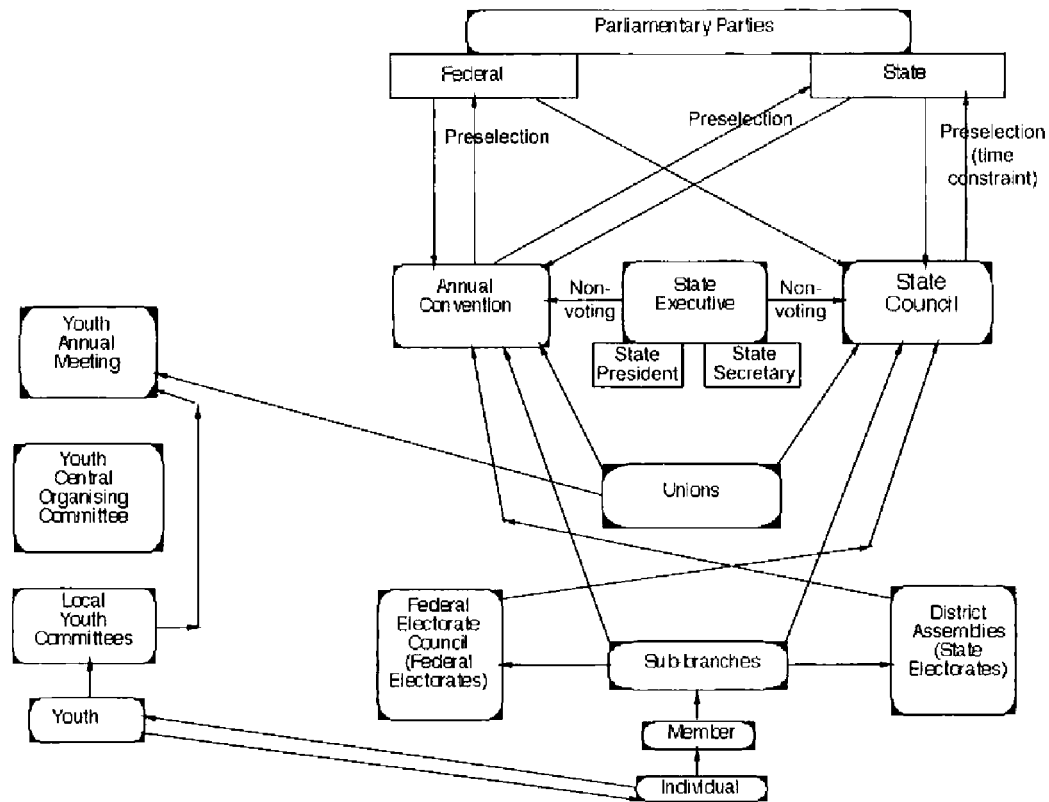
Hence, Australia, unlike New Zealand, did not match the mass party ideal type. In contrast, the parliamentarianism of parties of the colonial equivalent of notables gave greater independence to members of parliament, although this also meant that the role of party membership was limited in the development of party policy, leading to tensions. However, party members have continued to play important roles in the selection of candidates through the collegiate system.

Significance of Exterior Parties

The ALP is an excellent example of another of Duverger's types, namely an "indirect" party; whereby a large amount of income and input, such as guaranteed membership of policy-making bodies, is given to affiliated organizations. In the case of the ALP, individual unions typically affiliate to state branches and in general have constituted about 60% of the attendance at state conferences, the main policy-making bodies. The South Australian branch of the ALP typifies this characteristic, and its structure is outlined in Figure 6.1. In other words, representation from the ordinary branches of the party has been a numerical minority. As indicated previously, the ALP was never instituted along the same lines as the mass membership parties of the Western European type. The organizational wing of the party has its legitimate right to authority enshrined in the party's federal and state constitutions.

The Country Party, as the National Party of Australia was known until 1976, in its first incarnation, grew out of various farmers and settlers associations in NSW in the early 1890s. In its second incarnation, it emerged federally in 1918 and immediately sought to ensure its future by amending the Commonwealth Electoral Act to implement the

Figure 6.1 South Australian Labor Party.



preferential voting system (the alternative vote). (For consistency of language the term Country Party will be used here to describe all three incarnations.)

The Country Party has throughout most of the 20th century maintained a strong extra-parliamentary organization. Since it went federal in 1918, it has maintained, at least in the formal constitutional sense, a strong commitment to the sovereignty of the extra-parliamentary wing over the parliamentary. Yet on closer examination, in its early years, pre-1918, it also had the characteristics of an interior party.¹⁷ In the colony of NSW in the 1890s, for example, a Country "party" emerged from within the parliamentary Protectionist Party at around the same time as the Farmers and Settlers Association was born. Similarly, the Farmers, Property Owners and Producers Association allowed its parliamentary representatives in the Victorian colonial and subsequently state houses a relatively free hand.

The ALP's boundaries have also at times been blurred. L. F. Crisp, in his detailed history of the party, has described the dominant role of the parliamentary Labor Party or "caucus," particularly when the party has been in office.¹⁸ There has also been a parallel tendency for the cabinet to dominate the caucus on policy questions. In fact, given the

weight of the historical precedents to the contrary, the strength of the ideological commitment within the ALP toward the organizational sovereignty model remains almost a contradiction.

The Empire Writes Back

Comprising former colonies, the Australian polity has long attracted attention in Britain and in other former colonies, such as New Zealand. A monograph published by the Institute of Commonwealth Studies at the University of London specified the ALP and the Country Party as "distinctively" Australian.¹⁹ Much earlier in the century, in 1902, New Zealander William Pember Reeves published a two-volume study titled *State Experiments in Australia and New Zealand*, which covered the beginnings of labor and progressive movements in Australia and New Zealand. Reeves' subsequent appointment as director of the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1908 and his work on the British Royal Commission investigating electoral matters placed him in an ideal position to proselytize regarding the democratic precocity of Australia and New Zealand.²⁰ British academics became fascinated by the ALP. It was viewed as qualitatively different from the British Labor Party, where a crude theory of colonialism might have been seen as a parent model for the local branch to copy.

James Jupp's work would later become important in this regard. His 1965 article "Their Labor and Ours" argues that Australian workers were better organized in the 19th century; but that their British counterparts became "better organized" in the 20th century largely due to the hostile environment.²¹ Nonetheless, the ALP and the labor movement were given merit for precocity. In the important immediate post-World War II period, the ALP continued to feature in the story of Australian "exceptionalism."

The Country Party, as noted above, was also viewed in Britain as unique to Australia, with no British counterpart. Because it did not fit the classic Westminster mode, the party was sometimes viewed as an interest group rather than as a proper political party or as the rural wing of the nonlabor coalition.²² Although it was argued by some British scholars that Australia, alongside Canada and New Zealand, was Westminster "transplanted," local "characteristics," such as the absence of a "governing class," meant that the Australian executive was weaker than in Britain and parties were stronger.²³ Australian parties were seen as having "bureaucratic styles and inner workings."

LONG-TERM THREE-PARTY SYSTEM STABILITY

In international terms, the Australian party system looks stable and has been incredibly durable. This has been underpinned by changes to

the electoral and voting systems designed to entrench the position of the three key players in the party system. Such moves could be interpreted as early and important indicators of the cartelization thesis. The preferential (that is alternate) vote (adopted in 1918) has allowed the Country Party to become a niche party. Compulsory voting (adopted in 1924) was supported by the three parties to their mutual advantage, leading to a turnout rate of around 95%. Public funding of federal elections was introduced by the ALP government of Prime Minister R. J. Hawke in 1984, with the coalition parties opposing; but by 1991, when the original legislation was amended, all parties were supportive.²⁴ Government advertising targeted to marginal (that is swing) seats has created, if not the permanent campaign, a series of precampaigns.²⁵

Scholars have agreed that compulsory voting probably helped the ALP by compelling lower-income voters to go to the polls. As Overacker pointed out in 1952, "No modern democracy has shown greater readiness to experiment with various electoral methods than Australia. Voting is compulsory in State and Commonwealth elections, preferential voting is widely used, and proportional representation applies in the election of the Tasmanian Assembly and the Commonwealth Senate. The character of the party battle and the behavior of the voters are affected by the compulsory franchise and preferential voting."²⁶ In institutional terms, the Senate, originally intended as a states house, has become, as the result of the adoption of proportional representation (PR) in 1948, a place where Australian Democrats (1977–2008), the Greens (1998–), and other minor parties and independents can find expression.²⁷

The three major parties have absorbed major organizational challenges. In some cases, they have been slow to respond to demographic changes, such as migration and the growing movement by Australian women into the public arena, but have given enough ground to maintain credibility.

Ironically, however, PR has not provided the minority representation often expected. In just over 100 years of representative government, there have been only two Aboriginal senators. Women's representation has in fact at times fared better in the House of Representatives than in the Senate (elected on PR). We may note the comparative position of Labor and non-Labor in the crucial 1980s decade when women first moved into the national parliament in any numbers; particularly significant is the "plateauing" of Labor women numbers and the gradual increase of Liberal women. The number of Labor women remained static—at 13—from 1983 until 1987 and then in 1990 it decreased to 11. By 1990 the coalition parties—with 10 Liberal members and 1 National woman member—had caught up with Labor representatives. There was a curious twist: the majority of Labor women were in the House and the majority of Liberal women were in the Senate.

Two features are significant. On the one hand, the Labor experience defied the general rule that women—and other minorities—do better under PR. On the other, Duverger's party "contagion" effect has become apparent. Duverger predicted that in a two-party system electoral competition would lead to a continual process of borrowing. In his version, the parties of the right would tend to borrow from those of the left, which he saw as more innovative.

In general, the party system and political culture have mediated the impact of electoral systems. The level of voting support for the three major parties has also remained extremely stable, and as such Australia has also inspired interesting work on party systems, drawing on different types of data. Don Aitkin's pioneering election survey books demonstrated that Australians had retained an unusually high level of party identification. In electoral terms, Aitkin argued that the party system was remarkably stable.²⁸ His work focused on the lower house vote, downplaying the role of minor parties, but it provides further evidence of the strength and stability of the party system.

More recently the debate over class and voting has been interpreted in terms of the "blue-collar" vote, the "aspirational" voter, and the *déclassé* vote. The rise of minor parties and independents can be partially explained by the breakdown of class-based politics in terms of globalization and the rise of neo-liberalism, on the one hand, and by the emergence of postmaterialist politics, on the other hand. Interesting work has emerged explaining the support for the One Nation Party on the right and the support for the Australian Democrats and the Greens, on the left.²⁹ Australia awaits a monograph explaining the nature of minor parties at the federal and state levels.

What emerges from comparative insights is the sheer organizational complexity of Australian systems as compared with the Westminster countries of Britain, Canada, and New Zealand.³⁰ The complexity of parliamentary arrangements is also an important feature, particularly before World War II, belying a superficial sense of tranquillity and system maintenance, as the parliamentary wings have been prone to splits and divisions, with splitters and rebels dominating the landscape especially in the years between World War I and II.³¹ The party system was also racked with major splits in 1916, 1931, and 1954.³² The first two had more of a parliamentary focus than the third, which involved the whole of the ALP, including the executive, the conference, and state branches as well as the parliamentary caucus.³³

Sean Scalmer argues that institutional dramas were a means of creating modernization in the Labor Party.³⁴ The 1954 split in the ALP was one of the few avenues for bringing religion into Australian politics; whereas studies of the British parties have invariably discussed religion, whether it is the role of dissenters in the Liberal Party or Christian socialism and the British Labor Party.³⁵ In the 1954 split, most

Roman Catholic members of parliament left the federal but not the state party.³⁶ Yet in the ALP split of 1916, most Protestant members of parliament left the state and the federal Labor Party.³⁷ The role of religion at the institutional level has been disputed, with some suggesting that Australia is considerably more secular than comparable societies as it lacks a European-style Christian democratic party. However, most agree that both communism and catholicism had largely disappeared as grassroots forces with the end of the Cold War in 1989.³⁸ There has been genuine debate over the role of ideology in policy making and whether the same processes that dogged Britain and the United States affected Australia. There was considerable evidence for the disappearance of ideology and policy convergence in the post-World War II era.³⁹ Here we saw echoes of the British debates over "Butskellism," whereby postwar affluence had generated policy convergence, the conservatives under Chancellor "Rab" Butler had accepted welfare and some public ownership; and the Labor Party under their leader Hugh Gaitskell had rejected militancy. Scholars such as Frances Castles have continued to argue that party does matter, in the sense that the political complexion of the government in office is important.⁴⁰ This is not the same as arguing that parties necessarily have a consistent ideology. Murray Goot, in a very useful 2004 article, argued in favor of policy divergence, based on a detailed analysis of speeches, policies, and opinion polls.⁴¹ Yet the partisans of policy convergence remain vocal and active.⁴²

The Role of the Australian Labor Party

Two factors have made the ALP the most important party to understand in Australian politics. First, the venerability of the party—it dates from 1891—and its strength across all states and territories have generated a large volume of anniversary work. The Liberal Party's shorter and more fractured history, plus its weakness in two parts of the federation—Queensland and the Northern Territory—has meant fewer anniversaries. Second, the ALP's ongoing links with the union movement, the importance of party conference for policy making, and the entrenched role of the party platform and, hence, of the party conference have created semipublic fora for media commentary and public analysis. The liberals' links with business are more diffuse, more private, and generally more respectable. Liberal policy is officially made by the party leader, not by the party conference, and not by associated interest groups, although the conference makes the party's rules on important issues such as candidate selection. This has meant that political biography is an important tool for those wishing to understand the dynamics of the liberals in government and in opposition.

The significance of the ALP is also reflected in its capacity to generate international commentary. Overseas writers of note have famously included Vladimir Lenin whose comment that the ALP was really a “liberal-bourgeois” party was picked up by important postwar writers of the New Left such as Robert Catley and Bruce McFarlane.⁴³ French writer André Metin’s comment that the ideology underpinning Australian labor parties was “socialism without doctrine” was utilized in Hancock’s *Australia* (originally published in 1930 and reprinted in the 1960s) then faithfully reproduced by later generations of scholars.⁴⁴ Hancock’s work has had continuing importance in the parties’ literature, as he is generally credited with stating that the ALP held the “initiative” in Australian politics. This was partly in response to Lord Bryce’s observation that the nonlabor parties were parties of “resistance.”⁴⁵

It is to that important nexus between the ALP and unions that we now turn. A range of writers—starting with Don Rawson in *Labor in Vain?*—has argued that the ALP’s links with the unions have inevitably led to “bread and butter” policies of a kind favored by pragmatic unionists.⁴⁶ To Rawson asking whether the ALP is socialist is as relevant as questioning the presbyterianism of the state. The laborist approach has been adopted by the majority of works on the ALP in government at the national and state levels. Crisp’s idea of the ALP having a tradition of reform and improvement is consistent with the laborist view, as is historian B. D. Nairn’s idea of the Labor Party as “civilizing capitalism.”⁴⁷ In contrast, the idea of the Labor Party as “utopian” or “populist” was suggestive of a wider range of social inputs into the party, and in fact there was a range of social movements associated with the unions and the party in its formative period.⁴⁸

The laborist model, however, was accepted by many of those critiquing the so-called shift to the right by the labor governments in 1983–1996.⁴⁹ It is interesting that an earlier generation of scholars argued that there are general tendencies that lead governments to “betray” their supporters, and the most famous work here is V. G. Childe’s *How Labour Governs*, published in the 1920s.⁵⁰ His study was suggestive of a general trend—along the lines of R. Michels’ “iron law of oligarchy”—for governments to betray the hopes of their supporters.⁵¹ In the 1980s neo-liberalism had successfully challenged more traditional “laborist” policy ideas of statism, leading to policies such as privatization, deregulation of the economy, corporatization of the state, the winding down of arbitration, and the cutting of social welfare. It is interesting that the British “Third Way” model, pioneered by British Labor Prime Minister Tony Blair and developed by political sociologist Anthony Giddens, adopted certain ideas and approaches of the Hawke-Keating era.⁵² In general, the ALP had fewer philosophical objections in adopting the parliamentary way and managing state institutions than did the British Labor Party.

Indeed, some suggested that British Labor could learn from its Australian counterparts.

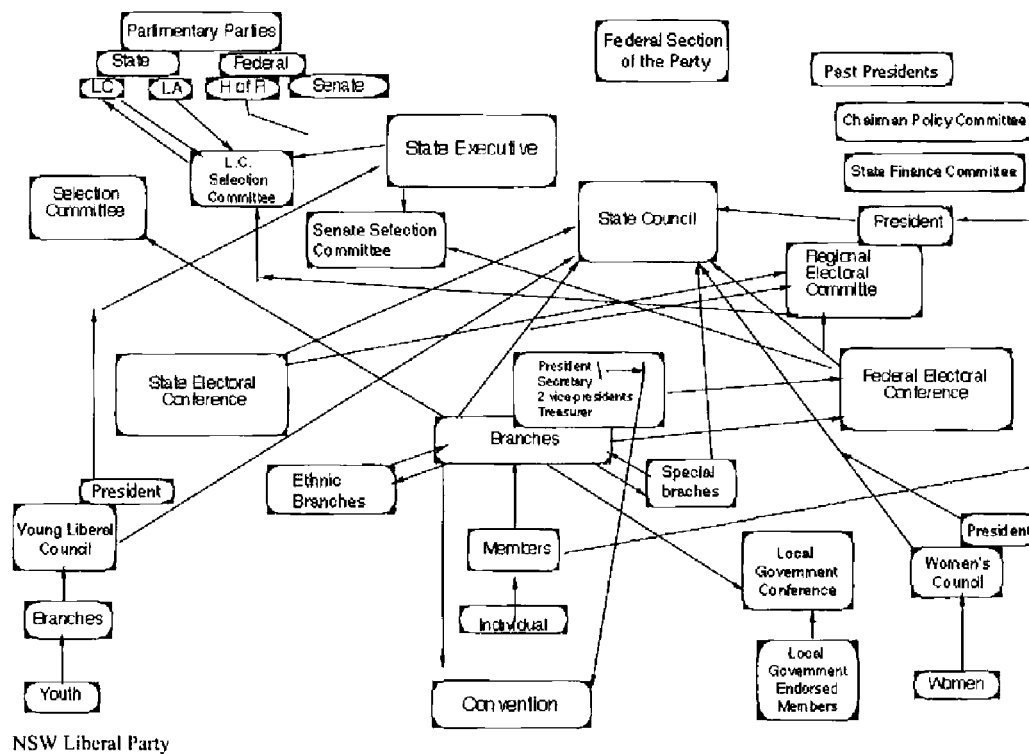
Whether the ALP was fundamentally changing is open to debate, but the data on its declining support among blue-collar voters are clear-cut. While the "affluent worker" hypothesis argued that the working class had been transformed via affluence and therefore the ALP had adjusted to suit, there was also evidence that the ALP had become less representative of the working class and was becoming more middle class.⁵³ Yet this did not mean that the membership of the ALP was now simply middle class. For example, while the numbers of clerks and salaried workers in the ALP had remained broadly representative of the population at large, the percentage of professionals was significantly higher than the general population. That many of these professionals were female, whose march into the unions and the ALP was facilitated by the equal pay and free education policies of the Whitlam government, created a backlash within the ALP itself after the 1996 defeat and the subsequent failure to win elections.⁵⁴

THE NONLABOR PARTIES

The modern LPA—formed in 1945—emerged from among the heirs to the original interior parties (see Table 6.1). Partly as a consequence of this, it has adapted the rhetoric of parliamentarianism. Under this model individual members of parliament are considered as representatives of their constituencies rather than as delegates of their party (Figure 6.2). In practice, of course, the overwhelming majority of liberal members of parliament have followed the party line. Don Chipp provided one notable exception; policy disagreements led him to form his own political party in 1977, the Australian Democrats. A vigorous center party drawing support from political moderates, drew around 10% of the Senate vote until 2007 when its vote slipped below the level necessary for election. This can also be seen as the exception that proved the rule, demonstrating the limits to ideological toleration within the LPA. The party's commitment to parliamentarianism is reflected in the relative weakness of its central organizational machinery as compared with the ALP's. (The ALP's national executive has intervened into the internal affairs of state branches on various occasions and has also determined preselections.) The LPA adopted changes to its organizational constitution in 1995 at its 50th anniversary Federal Council meeting, which gave its federal executive limited powers to involve itself in certain financial and preselection issues of its state divisions.

There is some evidence of the stages theory of party development in respect of the Liberal Party. Moves toward professionalization—of the kind associated with cartels—are present on both sides of politics. Less clear-cut is the evidence for Kirchheimer's "catch all" party, although

Figure 6.2 New South Wales Liberal Party.



NSW Liberal Party

there is some evidence for the persistence of traditional ideologies among the grass roots and middle level elites.⁵⁵

Subsequent to the defeat of the liberal–national coalition government in 1983 and the consequent promulgation of an internal review the same year, the LPA's federal election campaigns have been based on more professional central planning and coordination. This is in spite of its traditional commitment to internal party federalism and parliamentarianism. In its 1996 campaign, when the coalition routed the ALP to win office after 13 years in opposition, the LPA ran a brilliant, centrally conducted campaign in concert with the National Party. It repeated this in its successful 1998, 2001, and 2004 campaigns.

In ideological terms, since the early 1990s, the parliamentary elites of all three major parties accepted a broad commitment to neo-liberalist policies, including free trade. This often put them offside with their members and was partly responsible for a voter drift toward the minor parties. It has allowed emerging parties of the left, such as the Greens, and emerging parties of the right, such as the One Nation Party, to gain some political traction, at least for a time.

CANDIDATE SELECTION AND PARTY DEMOCRACY

The study of internal party organization must go beyond reading rules and regulations, as Lex Watson, describing the process by which

the ALP's federal executive "modernized" the internal affairs of both the NSW and the Victorian state branches during the 1970s, fully recognized. Although relying himself largely on party rules, Watson was aware of their inadequacy and quoted Duverger, "The organization of parties depends essentially on unwritten practice and habit. . . . Constitutions and rules never give more than a partial idea of what happens, if indeed they describe reality at all."⁵⁶

Here we begin with rules and some examples of important changes in recent years, and then move to a consideration of an internal party activity that can be and has been directly observed that speaks more than the rules about how internally democratic parties really are: candidate selection.

Internal Rules

There are several variations to the basic structure of party organizations in Australia. These differences reflect different histories, traditions, and practices. In some cases, there are classic Weberian pyramids with bodies gradually shrinking in size but increasing in significance as we move toward an apex. In the NSW branch of the Liberal Party, for example, the broad-based convention (or conference) is at the base of the pyramid (with between 800 and 1,000 delegates). Delegates are elected from the branches, with an ex-officio representative from the party's executive. The convention meets annually. In the middle of the pyramid stands the state council (between 600 and 700 delegates). It is smaller than the conference, meets three or four times per year, and also includes representation directly elected from the branches. This is supplemented with fairly extensive representation from the party's "special" interests, such as youth, women, special branches (such as the city, ethnic groups, etc.), policy committees, federal members of parliament, and policy committee chairs. At the apex there is a state executive and many standing committees. Most of the state branches of the Liberal Party include state councils.

In Queensland, the most significant center-right party is the National Party, which also has a three-level pyramid structure. In common with several other state branches of various parties, Queensland includes special representation for rural areas and interests, reflecting the fact that approximately two-thirds of the population lives outside the state capital (Brisbane) and that mining and other rural exports are significant parts of the economic base. In Victoria, the Liberal Party has a taller, four-stage pyramid structure, with a powerful administrative committee standing between the state council and the very small (fewer than 12) state executive.

On the center-left ALP side of politics, there is much greater structural variation between the states. This is somewhat ironic given the ALP's more centralized structure overall. For example the ALP's

national executive has the power to intervene in the internal affairs of the state branches, and this has occurred to the extent of total reorganization on a number of occasions over the past 35 years. It has also happened more regularly over specific instances dealing with the selection of parliamentary candidates. In the early 1970s, the national executive (then called the federal executive) of the ALP intervened in the internal affairs of the Victorian ALP, to reorganize that state, root and branch. It emerged with a new constitution, a new set of informal rules, and a division of power between three rival factions (the right, the left, and the center). Previously, the branch had been dominated by a small group of left-wing political activists and union leaders and had been consistently faring poorly in elections. The new postintervention structure was a four-stage pyramid style, consisting of a conference, a council, an administrative committee, and an executive. The most important feature of the new constitution was the provision of PR for the selection of activists to branch positions and for the selection of candidates to public office (via the Public Office Selection Committee). This was designed to ensure that no one group could control the affairs of the branch, and no group would be entirely excluded from influence.

Candidate Selection

It is widely agreed that candidate selection is crucial but that we know little about it. In parliamentary democracies, with a high proportion of safe seats, selection is in many cases tantamount to election. Austin Ranney's comment about the significance of the selection process was made over 40 years ago but is still very relevant: "Properly understood, selection conferences that pick parliamentary candidates constitute far more significant battlegrounds than annual conferences that adopt resolutions."⁵⁷

Selection processes are notoriously difficult to research. There are difficulties in collecting information, as they are part of the so-called secret garden of politics, yet the processes of candidate selection are particularly important for those who have an interest in participatory democracy.⁵⁸ For others, such as Giovanni Sartori or Joseph Schumpeter, with a different definition of democracy, the politics of preselection would be less pressing.⁵⁹ If democracy is interpreted to mean that the people have the opportunity to change their rulers, in the sense of rejecting the status quo and then electing a different party or parties to office, then the precise composition of the competing elites is less relevant.

My own belief is that understanding how preselection works is important for understanding how the political process works overall.⁶⁰ It is also significant for understanding who participates in the process: How does it determine who is included and who is excluded from political decision making? What are the biases within the system?

Preselection processes in Australia are complicated by two features of internal party government: First, there have been growing tensions between the relative roles of the local (namely, branch and electorate levels) and central (namely, state executive and administrative committee) levels in candidate selection. Second, and in a parallel fashion, there have been stresses between the state and national or federal levels of the party. This has been particularly true of the ALP, where candidate selection debates have traditionally been resolved in favor of the center. For the 1987 elections, for example, the national executive resolved that the positions of sitting senators were to be protected. Then in 2007, the ALP's federal parliamentary leadership, which had been in opposition since 1996, engineered a rule change at the April national conference that allowed the national executive to decide on candidates in certain circumstances. Even the 2007 rule protected candidates who had already been selected. However, the Liberal Party's federal executive "lacks the power to direct" state divisions (that is branches); in contrast the ALP's executive has intervened in the internal affairs of various untidy state benches.⁶¹

In addition, a process of pre-preselection takes place at the grassroots level within the ALP. In Victoria, for example, there is a highly formalized organization. Members join a local ALP branch and, in most cases, a local branch of one of the factions of the party. Consequently for the pre-preselection process, the local left votes for a candidate (if there is more than one presented) and then the central left makes the final decision.

The next level of decision making is the formal preselection process. In the 1989 election, sitting members of parliament were reselected unopposed and there were six nominees for four seats. Consequently, there was very little real competition at the nomination stage. This is because, in the words of one representative of the Victorian ALP, "each faction has a ticket and this ticket is followed."

The formal rules of the Victorian ALP provide for lower house candidates to be selected by a 50-50 mixture of local votes (25 people) and central votes (from the 100 member central panel). The composition of the central panel reflects the somewhat uneasy factional balance of power in Victoria. Estimates vary slightly, but in 1988 one source gave the socialist left 43%, the Labor Unity (or right) 43%, the independents 7%, and the nonfactionalized delegates 7%.

Real factional struggles over preselection have from time to time erupted into conflicts over rules. The right has challenged the method for selecting upper house candidates, which is solely in the hands of the central panel: "Labor Unity sources claim the Left's dominance of the selection committee has led to 10 of the 18 ALP [State] Upper House members coming from their faction. Labor Unity, with almost 50 per cent of the conference delegates, has only four—the same number

as the small Independent faction."⁶² In Victoria, then, the selection process within one's faction could be construed as yet another hurdle for aspirants. Perhaps ironically, women and members of ethnic minorities have fared better in Victoria at the state and federal levels than in NSW, which has the supposedly more democratic process of a plebiscite! The openness of the preselection contests in the NSW ALP is limited by the same two factors that have already been mentioned. Sitting members of parliament are rarely challenged, and the factions "determine things by reason." In order to win a majority of votes at a plebiscite (that is, a ballot of the rank and file), it is essential to have the backing of one of the party's major factions.

Plebiscites have also been the subject of scandals, which play havoc with party unity and in that sense make nonsense of the *raison d'être* of the whole organized faction system. As Watson pointed out long ago, "on the more seamy side, plebiscites have been the subject of several scandals about ballot rigging."⁶³ In 1989, the row over the plebiscite for the state lower house seat (and safe Labor) seat of Liverpool was a replay of ancient history. The row was smoothed over and the state labor leader, Bob Carr, told the media in March 1989 and reported in the *Australian Financial Review* on March 7, that the factional conflict over the results, with allegations of ballot rigging, was really a "complex argument over maps." The left's candidate had won the original ballot, but the result was challenged by the dominant right faction. In the event, the state's administrative committee installed its own candidate (from the right) and quelled threatened left-wing court action by invoking party unity.

The ALP has gradually divested itself of the rank-and-file ballot or plebiscite as a method for selecting candidates. The ALP in NSW is, thus, atypical among the state branches of the ALP.⁶⁴ The other states have moved toward selection committees, which include both central and local representation.

The selection of women candidates depends heavily on the informal processes within the parties. The problem begins in the pre-preselection process, where women are inadequately encouraged to present themselves as possible candidates. This is true even in the ALP where far fewer women than men nominate themselves. In 1987, the percentage of women candidates was actually higher than the percentage of would-be candidates who were women, as reported by male candidates, and lower than the average size of the field, as reported by the smaller number of female candidates: slightly over 19% of all ALP candidates were women. Men and women reported an average-sized field of four (Table 6.2).

The picture was a little different on the liberal side of politics. The mean size of the fields was larger, namely 10 for male respondents and 7 for the females. In both cases the figures in Table 6.2 suggest that liberal women are less successful than liberal men in the preselection process. The mean score for the women nominees, calculated from the

Table 6.2 Gender and Internal Democracy

<i>Party</i>	<i>Would-be female candidates¹</i>	<i>Female candidates</i>	<i>Representation measures²</i>
ALP	Men reported a mean of 0.5/4 (12%);	$N = 37/194$	$12 - 19 = -7$ (overrepresented)
	Women reported a mean of 1.5/4 (37%)	19.1%	$37 - 19 = 18$ (underrepresented)
Liberal Party	Men reported a mean of 1.99/10 (20%);	$N = 23/180$	$20.0 - 12.8 = 7.2$ (underrepresented)
	Women reported a mean of 1.32/7 (19%)	12.8%	

¹ Data are from the Candidate Survey 1987, with 70 responses.

² If the percentage of women candidates is lower than the percentage of would-be candidates, then the process discriminates against women.

responses by male candidates, was almost two, and for women candidates it was just under one and a half.

In most cases, incumbents are rarely subjected to preselection challenges. This is demonstrated in the information provided by the ALP in Western Australia and Victoria. Sitting members of parliament in Victoria and in Western Australia were reselected unopposed. For the 1984 elections, when Carolyn Jakobsen was preselected in Cowan in a field of four men, the data show women to have been highly successful. One ALP state secretary noted that while incumbents are not officially protected, they are "cosseted." A National Party secretary made the same point by noting: "Rules do not protect sitting members but practice does."

In sum, although much progress has been made, the net result of both the formal rules and informal practices of candidate selection (especially within the pre-preselection stage of nomination) in Australian parties is considerably less than fully democratic.⁶⁵

CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the emergence of the contemporary party systems, in the context of democratic precocity. I have also questioned the concept of democracy, noting that, particularly in Australia, it was explicitly interpreted in a racially based way, and the new federation adopted a racially based franchise explicitly excluding "coloreds" and Aboriginal natives.⁶⁶ The case of women was more contradictory. On the one hand, female suffrage was gained before the 20th century in some parts of Australia, while on the other hand, women's political activism was consciously discouraged.

The nascent political parties were not fully implicated in this process; paternalistic and patriarchal codes were in place before the parties had

emerged, yet for the most part they were happy to perpetuate these structures. The term *frozen continent* describes Australia in terms of participation and representation, as the white male ascendancy established at the time of the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia remained in place for the next century.