

Chapter 2

In the Wilderness: The Whys and Wherefores of Opposition

In this chapter, we examine the diverse factors that influence Opposition ‘behaviour’, a term which encompasses Opposition strategy (the Opposition’s objective vis-a-vis the Government) and tactics (the various means by which it attempts to carry out its strategy), but also other phenomena such as party splits and ideological revision. To some extent we follow Dahl’s approach, which according to Blondel (1997: 471, 472) groups the various explanations for the ‘patterns’ of Opposition into the categories ‘institutional’ (for example, constitutional structure, electoral and party systems) and ‘socioeconomic’ (such as political culture, the extent to which opinions are polarised around political issues, and the existence of cleavages). We depart from Dahl’s approach, however, in adopting the broader term ‘non-institutional’ to refer to those variables somewhat within the Opposition’s sphere of influence (for example, party leadership and ideology, and conclusions drawn about the reasons for losing Government), meaning that factors such as political culture are treated as institutional variables because they are largely beyond the control of Oppositions or parties, whose actions over time arguably would, to some extent, shape political culture, but not in the short-term, in between elections, for example.

Although focused mainly on the factors that shape the behaviour of the typical Westminster Opposition, otherwise known as the ‘Shadow Government’, given its obvious relevance to the Australian system, our analysis draws on examples from a range of countries, which both demonstrate the importance of such variables as electoral and party systems, as well as helping to clarify the context of Opposition in Australia inhabited by Labor. Both institutional and non-institutional factors are shown to be important, with neither emerging as more decisive. On the other hand, some commentators lean towards attributing greater primacy to institutional factors, which partly reflects the fact that there are many more variables influencing an Opposition’s behaviour than it can control, and that this behaviour will depend upon political and economic circumstances at the time—an obvious point perhaps, but one ignored by much vacuous media commentary on Oppositions, who are routinely depicted as being blessed with eternal free will.

While one reading of a great deal of the research suggests that it is difficult to predict the overall behaviour of an Opposition by referring to any one set of factors (institutional or non-institutional), and that each new Opposition has the potential to display different behaviour patterns given the intervention of certain political and economic factors, it does offer some insights which are particularly relevant to Labor during the periods studied, including the role of changes in the economic environment, the impact of conclusions drawn about the reasons for losing office, and the way in which being in Opposition has historically exposed the underbelly of the British Labour Party (like the ALP) to greater prodding and poking from extra-parliamentary forces such as trade unions and party conferences.

This chapter is in two sections. The first discusses the relationship between Oppositions and various institutional variables, including electoral and party systems, constitutional structures, and compulsory voting. The second examines the impact of variables over which the Opposition potentially can exercise *some* control, such as the ideology and background of political parties, leadership, and the conclusions drawn by Oppositions about why they were ejected from office.

Institutional Variables

A multitude of electoral and constitutional variables, according to Dahl, affect Opposition behaviour, including: the extent to which constitutional arrangements allocate sources of power to the chief executive, the legislature, and the courts (separation of powers); whether a federal or unitary system applies; the relative magnitude of the political means conferred on the chief executive and legislature for exerting influence on one another; and the electoral system, whether of the single-member district or proportional representation (PR) variety.¹ Dahl cites the case of the US, where the constitutional framework militates against a high degree of identifiability and concentration among Oppositions, thereby encouraging diffuseness, and discouraging strict competition in favour of bargaining strategies. By spawning a variety of alternative sites,² the constitutional separation of powers reduces the importance of elections as ultimate arbiters of politics. The cumulative result is that the distinction between Government and Opposition is much less clear in the US. So significant is the impact of electoral systems, in Dahl's eyes, that if Britain were to change from a single-member system to a form of PR, 'the present

¹A single-member system is one in which electors each possess one vote, with the candidate attracting the most votes being declared the winner, even if he or she does not gain an absolute majority. A PR system, in contrast, is one in which elections seek, by multimember seats or reserve lists, to allocate seats on the basis of the proportion of votes received (Butler, 1981: 25).

²Dahl (1966b: 338) defines the site for encounters between Government and Opposition as the 'situation or circumstances in which an opposition employs its resources to bring about a change'.

degree of concentration, identifiability, and strict competitiveness of the opposition party surely would not continue to exist'.³ Because no one party is normally able under PR to form a majority, Dahl (1966a: 349–351) suggests, rather than jostling to attract the number of votes in elections required to win a majority of seats in parliament and then form a government (cabinet or executive) by itself (Strategy One), parties under PR attempt to use their representation in the Parliament to secure an influential place in a governing coalition (Strategy Two).

Also emerging as significant is the party system. Dahl argues that the concentration of the Opposition—whether constituted in a single organisation or more widely dispersed in a number of independent organizations—depends on the nature of the party system of which the Opposition is an important element, the four types being: (a) two-party systems with a high degree of internal party unity (e.g. Britain); (b) two-party systems with relatively low internal party unity (e.g. United States); (c) multi-party systems with relatively high internal party unity (e.g. Sweden and Norway); and multi-party systems with low internal party unity (e.g. Italy and France). Each party system, according to Dahl, is associable with different Opposition strategies. Two-party systems of the British kind, where each party competes to achieve a majority of seats in the Parliament, produce no holds barred zero-sum contests most of the time;⁴ in two-party systems with relatively low internal party unity such as the US, strict competition is confined to election periods, with inter-party coalition-forming taking place in normal periods of Congress; and in multi-party systems, strict competition is either unlikely, or if one party is unable to form a majority on its own, nigh on impossible (Dahl, 1966b: 332–7).

The implications of Dahl's arguments for the ALP are that, in the absence of any switch to a PR system, Labor's strategy in Opposition, at its most basic, will involve the objective of defeating the government of the day via a public campaign intended—in theory, at least—to convince people to vote for it in an effort to secure a majority of seats in the Parliament, which will then allow it to implement its policies. As Marland and Flanagan (2013: 272) put it, 'Opposition political parties are in a constant state of exploring how to increase their chances of influencing or forming government'. Thus, an attendant assumption is that Labor will continue to adopt the Shadow Cabinet model, will be physically and organisationally distinct

³This argument is supported partly by Dunleavy, Margetts and Weir's study of the hypothetical impact on the 1992 British general election of three different types of electoral systems, two of which were forms of PR. The authors concluded: 'Both proportional systems would ... have ushered in a period of three-party politics in England ... In 1992, the Conservatives would have remained the largest single party, but they would have been vulnerable to a centre-left deal between the Liberal Democrats and Labour' (Dunleavy, Margetts, & Weir, 1992: 655).

⁴Dahl (1966b: 336) did note that for much of the duration of the two world wars the British major parties agreed to form coalition governments, in the process substituting collaboration for competition. More recently, see the experience of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition that ruled the UK between 2010 and 2015.

from the Government, and will conduct its Opposition to the government in an unapologetically adversarial manner.

Yet, one of the criticisms levelled at Dahl revolves around his insinuation that parties are incapable of ‘playing an independent part: they appear to play a part only as a consequence of the characteristics of the electoral system’ (Blondel, 1997: 474). Numerous commentators point to the fact that countries with similar voting systems have given rise to very different party systems derivative of the nation’s history and its economic and social conditions (Butler, 1981: 11; Ionescu and Madaragia, 1968: 87, 88; Kirchheimer, 1957: 147). Eckstein cites India as a case in point: although possessing an electoral system virtually identical to that of Britain, it was characterised—initially, at least—by a very different (dominant) party system (Eckstein, 1968: 448). Kothari attributes the omnipresence of consensus and cooperation in India—in contrast to the British system—to historic and cultural factors specific to that country, though others have drawn attention to other facets setting it apart from the system running in its former colonial master, including its 29 jurisdictions: the national level, in addition to the country’s 28 states (Kothari, 1973: 305, 310; see, more recently, Manor, 2011). Beyond India, others have gone so far as to say that in fact the party system is the independent variable, that is political parties devise electoral systems that best preserve their interests (Lipson, 1953: 350).

Whatever recent evidence there is to justify this claim,⁵ it seems beyond doubt that Opposition strategy and tactics are governed somewhat by party system variations, which in turn respond to different electoral systems as well as to a range of other factors, including culture. Punnett (1973: 18), for example, maintains that the normal Government-Opposition pattern in the British Parliament would be ruptured under a different party system with three or more parties of equal strength, or a different electoral system that enabled minor parties to establish a foothold in the Parliament.

What this means in Australia is that it is likely that Labor’s broad strategy in Opposition, as described above, would be affected by a change to a system of PR only if it gave rise to other parties capable—individually or collectively—of threatening the ability of either of the major parties to rule in their own right. So long as the Australian two-party system⁶ remains intact, and a single-member arrangement continues to exist, Labor will continue to try to defeat the government

⁵Hague, Harrop, and Breslin (1998: 142) observe that the transitions to PR in South Africa and New Zealand in 1994 and 1996 respectively had ‘damaged the prospects of two-party systems.’ Although this statement would appear to support the view that party systems are subordinate to electoral systems, the examples could also be seen as supporting the argument that electoral arrangements correspond with the interests of the parties that decide them.

⁶There is some debate about whether Australia has a two-party system, given that, in addition to the ALP and the rising Greens party (see Appendix), when in power at the federal level the main conservative force, the Liberal Party of Australia, relies on the support of its junior Coalition partner, the (rural-based) National Party; some have thus described this system as a two-and-a-half party system (e.g. Eltham, 2010). For the purposes of convenience, we shall persist with describing Australia’s as a two-party system. For similar reasons, we shy away from debates about whether Australia has, strictly speaking, a ‘parliamentary system’ (see Ganghof, 2012), assuming instead that it does indeed have such a system.

through a public campaign, and to achieve office in its own right by winning the most number of seats in the House of Representatives, where the government is traditionally formed. While a different electoral system might affect changes in Labor's overall strategy, it is doubtful that it would have many repercussions for its policy development: thus, as we shall see in Chap. 8, the changes in the economic context in the 1970s would likely have had major ramifications for the policies of a social democratic party such as the ALP, irrespective of what electoral or party system existed at the time.

This knowledge shapes our response to the fact that the ALP operates in a replica of the classic British two-party system with a single-member voting system characterised by 'adversarial debate with government and opposition facing each other across the floor of the House' (Johnson, 1997: 491). Characteristically, almost immediately after elections in Westminster systems it is clear which party has the honour of forming Government,⁷ and which is saddled with the role of Opposition (Dahl, 1966b: 339). Speaking, again, within the British context, Gilljam and Karlsson (2015: 555–6) write that, '[b]eing out of office, and excluded from both deciding and implementing policy, [the Opposition] is consigned to criticising and distancing itself from the ruling majority. The ambition of opposition representatives is to portray themselves as viable political alternatives to the ruling majority'. In Australia, this same basic pattern applies.

By contrast, in countries that do not produce immediately decisive electoral outcomes, as in the cases of multi-party systems such as Holland and Italy, parties aim to influence public opinion and win seats in elections. But the inability to form a majority except as part of a coalition means that 'they shape their strategy to take advantage of opportunities for bargaining their way into the current coalition, replacing it with a different coalition, or forcing new elections that are expected to improve their bargaining position' (Dahl, 1966b: 339, 340).

Part of the fascination with the British model can be attributed not just to its imperial and regal pomp, but also to its ripe old age (Helms, 2004, 26). Yet, this curious Westminster species, with Her Majesty's Opposition and 'Shadow Government', replete with quirks such as a salary for the Leader of the Opposition, is in a small minority (Bale, 2015, 61). In fact, writing in 2013, Best noted that the model applied not even to Britain herself, which at the time did not have the expected one-party dominant government facing off against a one-party Opposition (Best, 2013, 337). More divergently still, witness France, where 'every party takes

⁷In a significant departure from the norm, which is arguably yet more evidence of the growing volatility and unpredictability in politics in western countries, it was not until more than a week after the 2016 Australian federal election that a conservative Liberal-National government was formed.

up, during the electoral campaign, the language of opposition' (Grosser, 1966: 294). There, even the President can feign Opposition (Helms, 2004, 35). As Helms (2013: 127) comments:

[W]ith few exceptions – mostly from the family of Westminster democracies – party government has always been an illusion. In the large majority of established parliamentary democracies party government has effectively meant coalition government, with most new governments arising from protracted bargaining between parties (none of which is able to govern alone).

According to Punnett, in a multi-party system not dominated by one Opposition party, leaders might be more disposed to alliance-building with the aim of creating an alternative government. However, in a multi-party situation characterised by one dominant Opposition party, there is less pressure on that party's leaders to build alliances, with few concerns for the fortunes of the minor parties (Punnett, 1973: 439). While in more recent times the emergence of more complex party systems (e.g. the UK under Conservative-Liberal Democrat rule from 2010 to 2015) has not meant the demise of mainstream parties and their hold over government, it has seen an increase in 'the variety of coalition governments, many of which at least temporarily comprised new parties of the left and right' (Helms, 2013: 127).

The particular party system operating at any one time might impact not just on the party's broad strategy, but also on a party's policies, at least in the indirect sense that the polarisation of the electorate along two-party lines in majoritarian systems compels the Opposition to target with its policies the 10% of 'floating' voters vacillating between the parties from election to election (Jennings, 1957: 170). This may entail 'taking as its own policy, with embellishments and improvements, those items of Government policy which seem most popular' (Jennings, 1957: 170). This appears relevant to the experience of the ALP in Opposition: the holy grail of the 'middle-ground' was said by some to be the target of Labor in the late-1970s and 1980s, as the party moved away from policies historically associable with its traditional constituency. However, as we shall see, this movement was more attributable to the dramatic shift in economic conditions post-1975 rather than to electoral marketing strategies (see Chaps. 7–11).

Party systems and electoral systems, depending on how they interact with the former, are thus important institutional determinants of an Opposition's political behaviour and the feasible options at its disposal. Dahl (1966a: 350) also cites federalism as an institutional determinant, arguing that it throws up alternative sites for Opposition, in the process decreasing the importance of electoral encounters at other sites. There is support for this position elsewhere (Friedrich, 1966: 291). Because federalism enables a party simultaneously to be in Opposition and in government, it may use leverage from the latter to advance its position at another level of the political system. Kirchheimer's (1966: 252) argument that federalism is a key factor in the prevalence of bargaining politics in Germany, owing to the inability of any one party to dominate all levels of government or to win in its own

right, arguably still holds water in that country (see Helms, 2004: 30–34). But the argument does not appear generalisable to Government–Opposition dynamics in Australia, where the adversarial nature of the relations between the major parties remains as bitter as ever (however misleading this might be as to their concord on the distribution of wealth and power in the country, which does not change with alternations of office—see Chaps. 12–16). Whatever its electoral position in the states, Labor in Opposition federally will always strive for the vanquishing of the government.

In addition to federalism, Reid and Forrest argue that Australia’s bicameral Parliament, combined with strong party discipline and party ties between members of both Houses, widens options available to the Opposition to challenge the government, including the blocking of legislation, which is provided for in the Constitution. Bicameralism’s consequences for Opposition strategy depend, however, in this case at least, on the existence of other (mainly institutional) variables: the introduction of proportional representation to the Senate’s voting system in 1949 led to a situation where ‘Government control of the Senate has been very much more the exception than the rule’. In other words, the Senate comes into the equation in Australia largely because of the different electoral system deciding its make-up (Reid & Forrest, 1989: 64, 74).

One factor potentially even more important to understanding the modern ALP in Opposition is compulsory voting, which was first introduced for federal elections in Australia in 1912. As Crisp presciently writes, because ‘[p]arties which were formerly preoccupied with *inducing* the unattached voters to flock to the polls now know they will be there anyway’, they may concern themselves less with convincing voters—both during election and non-election periods—of their philosophies and programs, and turn their attention instead to making ‘hectic campaign appeals based usually on a few superficial scares, baits and catchcries’ (Crisp, 1950–51: 89, 91). In the case of Labor, according to Crisp’s scenario, rather than making a serious attempt to build up a core of committed voters, the party would seek merely to win the support of electors at election time, and pay them little attention thereafter. If this is true, then compulsory voting may contribute to the widespread confusion, evident during the Beazley period of Opposition in particular, about what Labor stands for. However, this is unlikely to be anything other than a minor factor in this process, since the Labour Party in Britain, a country with optional voting, has similarly been engaging in a process of ‘modernisation’ which has progressively whittled down the differences between itself and the Conservatives (see Scott, 2000). A similar process has been all too evident elsewhere (see Appendix).

Cumulative historical change represents another institutional variable of considerable importance: the reputation that precedes a political party ‘weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living’ representatives. In the case of the British system, politics has dramatically changed from the time when Oppositions focused on events in Parliament where, prior to the strengthening of party discipline,

governments often fell mid-term rather than at elections (Hanham, 1966–67: 35; Punnett, 1973: 194; Hockin, 1971–72: 64). Prior to WWI, Oppositions had little choice but to concentrate on criticising the Government rather than on providing an alternative, for as Hanham (1966–67: 38) points out: ‘Official party programmes were a relatively late development.’ This development, mirrored in Australia (Reid & Forrest, 1989: 63, 64), had ramifications for the Whitlam Opposition, which extensively constructed its ‘Program’ prior to taking power in 1972. Yet, it also impacted on the Beazley Opposition in a different way: when Beazley Labor was perceived as bereft of policy it was roundly criticised for being opportunistic and cynical, because Oppositions are now expected to be not just critical, but also to provide an alternative.

A related variable of note, at least when it comes to majoritarian systems, is the growing dominance of the media over politics, and, ipso facto, Opposition behaviour. Parties now devote to public relations and imagery considerably more funds and human resources, including opinion pollsters, media advisers, and spin-doctors (Turner, 1969: 78; Alderman, 1992: 71; Connolly, 1996: 107). In the darker terms characterising public political debate in the 2010s, these might readily be seen as just a rogues’ gallery of hangers-on and corruptible insiders. But undoubtedly their greater prevalence helps explain the cautious and conservative approach of Beazley Labor, which was heavily criticised for being unprincipled and media and poll-driven in its policy formation, particularly in relation to the hapless asylum-seekers who found their way to Australia in the early 2000s (see Chap. 15).

Also acting as a limitation on the strategies and tactics at the disposal of Oppositions is their very focus on implementing political change through parliament following a period of public electioneering (Jennings, 1957: 174). By requiring the Opposition to seek the highest number of votes, it can push it towards any policy deemed to have popular—read: lowest common denominator—appeal (Punnett, 1973: 32). Paradoxically, perhaps, Powell also argues that in the case of British Labour, this need for approval could also have detrimental electoral consequences, because it encourages the eschewing of ‘any well-defined appeal at all’, thus tainting the party in the eyes of its followers as well as in those of the wider population (Powell, 1959: 342, 343). This also may be relevant to the convergence process that arguably commenced in the post-Whitlam days of Opposition, and which has continued right through to the present. Particularly in relation to economic policy, many traditional supporters of the party have been dismayed at Labor’s mimicking of the Coalition’s economic rationalism. However, as is argued in the coming chapters, this is less a product directly of parliamentarism than of the collapse of the post-war boom, with all its far-reaching consequences for social democratic reformism.

On the other hand, Opposition, while not removing all parliamentary pressures, relaxes some of the constraints on party behaviour by liberating it from the earnest nature of government, and lessening the ramifications brought about by slip-ups or party infighting (Bilski, 1977: 318; Alderman 1968: 124). This process is particularly acute for the British Labour Party and, by implication, the ALP. Pimlott

(1992: 573) has argued that defeat, ‘which robs ministers of power, gives activists an opportunity for self-expression.’ The function of defeat might, therefore, be seen in quasi-psychological terms as allowing for the intake of a few deep breaths, as the cathartic process of letting of steam gets underway.

For the MPs themselves, the culture shock of being in Opposition and (relatively) deprived of power is profound enough to alter their political views on how well, or not, representative democracy functions at that time (Gilljam & Karlsson, 2015). Related to this is the fact that a party with little prospect of implementing its policies can indulge more radical or experimental ideas. Punnett (1973: 412) cites the British Liberals’ espousal in 1965 of military force to crush the Rhodesian rebellion when both the Labour government and the Conservative Opposition ruled out this option, as well as their comparatively more strident criticisms of American imperialism in Vietnam.⁸ In what may be a case of be careful what you wish for, there is a genuine dilemma for Oppositions when it comes to enjoying the benefits, freedoms, and future electoral rewards of membership in the ‘peanut gallery’, as opposed to the risks of losing support and, potentially, being almost annihilated by the electorate (e.g. Liberal Democrats, 2010–2015—see Cutts and Russell, 2015) after being tempted by the forbidden fruit of power, only to find its taste bitter beyond the wildest imagination:

On the one hand, remaining as part of the opposition may be perceived as the most remunerative strategy from an electoral point of view, given that it is as opposition parties that they normally achieve their initial electoral success. On the other hand, there may be a strong temptation to invest the newly acquired electoral ‘capital’ in a place at the government table, by trying to influence policy outcomes from that position or just by using the distributive power that governmental participation often entails. In other words, a typical trade-off between votes, policy and in-office goals is easily predictable when a party moves from a position of non-representation in the parliamentary arena, or of parliamentary irrelevance, to being an important player in the government coalition game (Tronconi, 2015, 579).

In terms of his future popularity, Donald Trump may well come to rue his successful assault on the Oval Office, for he might be better off, were the American political system to allow it, as a permanent Leader of the Opposition, from which vantage point he could take pot shots at the Washington establishment, as well as safely avoid disappointing his supporters who now expect him to, *inter alia*, build a wall shutting out the Mexicans—at their expense, no less—and to reverse the structural trade deficit with China.⁹ As Gilljam and Karlsson (2015: 559) put it: ‘To be in office means to take pragmatic stances in order to implement policies.

⁸Nevertheless, Punnett (1973: 413) argues that the aforementioned discipline associated with the acceptance of Parliament as the appropriate forum for contesting Government policies, and a susceptibility to accusations of comfortable irresponsibility as a result of their distance from office means, paradoxically, that the Liberal Party was required ‘to be at pains to show that it is a responsible party’.

⁹Indeed, it was clear immediately from the much more measured tone of Trump’s victory speech, delivered on the night of the election, that the shackles were already firmly in place.

Compromises are struck with political opponents. Radical ideals are disposed as unrealistic. Being out of office could ... radicalise representatives who want to distance themselves from the rulers in the centre'.

Being free from the moderating effects associated with managing the capitalist state was, as we shall see, one reason why the Whitlam Labor Opposition proved hospitable to radicalising external influences, such as the anti-Vietnam war movement and the trade unions. Perhaps, however, this also had something to do with the seemingly interminable length of time it had been in Opposition.¹⁰ As an Opposition ages, Punnett (1973: 210) argues, 'it loses touch with the realities of office, [and] the more unreal and dangerous its attempts at policy making are likely to be' (see also Maddox, 1996: 262). This is too reductive: the party may become desperate to get back into office and do anything, including ditching core beliefs. But the general point is sound.

Another important determinant of behaviour outside the scope of Opposition or party control is the composition of the Parliament (i.e. the number of seats held by the Government vis-à-vis the Opposition): a miniscule return of members can have a demoralising or subduing effect, while an enlarged presence in the Parliament can do the opposite (van Hattem, 1984: 364; Turner, 1969: 14, 15). Although the number of seats in the House of Representative held by Labor rose from a miserable 49 after the 1996 federal election to a morale-boosting 67 following the next poll two-and-a-half years later, it is difficult to determine if this had any noticeable effect on Labor's strategy, independent of the expected surge of adrenaline such an improvement might be expected to bring on.

In the extreme case of a minority Government, Fraser (1999) likened the impact to a 'downpour in a desert', with the Opposition 'brought to life' by the additional resources conferred on them, as well as the wider range of tactics at their disposal: censures of Government action, no-confidence motions in Ministers, and, the *coup de grace*, the forced resignation of a Government through the gaining of support for a motion of no-confidence or the denial of Supply. In the British context, prior to the 2010 general election it was correctly predicted that hung parliaments would become more frequent occurrences (Kalitowski, 2008). After the experience of the Australian 2016 federal election, in which the Liberal-National Coalition was returned with the barest of (one seat) majorities, this observation may also apply to this country, with expected impacts on Opposition strategy.

Severe or successive electoral defeats, by contrast, have the tendency to spur drastic policy rethinks and reviews of party structure and policies, in the hope that this will increase an Opposition's likelihood of a return from the wilderness (Alderman 1968: 132). It was thus with the pain of the whip of multiple electoral defeats still searing in his marrow that British Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell 'set about revising the image and policies of the Party and, in particular, the controversial 'Clause Four' concerning public ownership' (Turner, 1969: 61). One of his political progeny, Tony Blair, similarly 'modernised' New Labor during the 'long

¹⁰As of 1967, 18 years.

hegemony [1979–1997] of the Conservatives’ (Parry, 1997: 458). Perhaps an antipodean example of this is Labor’s dogged pursuit of more ‘responsible economic management’ under Bill Hayden, who sought to repudiate Whitlamism in the wake of a second consecutive crushing defeat at the hands of his Liberal opponent Malcolm Fraser in 1977. There may well be something to this, but, again, the empirical evidence suggests that this factor was subordinate to the changed economic context post-1974 as an explanation of Labor’s political direction under Hayden.

Political culture looms large as a major institutional determinant, and is partly, as we have already seen, the reason why countries with similar electoral systems can spawn very different party systems. Writing at a time when the word ‘culture’ had perhaps fewer unsettling connotations, Dahl attributes significant importance to cultural factors in explaining variations in the patterns of Oppositions across different countries, citing for example, Alfred Grosser, who argued that French people were more given to opposing than to supporting government. Problematic as any such generalisations inevitably are, Dahl is no doubt correct to say that patterns of Opposition in any given country will be affected by whether people are favourable towards the political system, whether people are generally trustful or suspicious towards their fellow citizens, whether they are cooperative in spirit or individualistic, and whether approaches to problem-solving are empirically based—that is, reliant on what is ‘practical’ and achieves the best outcome—or dogmatic (Dahl, 1966a: 352–355). Take just one aspect of this argument, Australia’s liberal political culture (Eccleston, 2002: 77). This might make Labor in Opposition more susceptible to free-market ideas, as seemed to be the case under Bill Hayden. This, of course, does not explain the hitherto more interventionist orientation of Labor—in contrast, an emphasis on the changes wrought by the end of the post-war boom can explain the apparent inconsistency—but it nonetheless could have acted as yet one more factor pushing Labor in that direction.

Dahl considers five other cultural-type factors to be instrumental. The first was subcultures, defined as ‘any difference in behaviour or beliefs [that] can lead to the development of so many special patterns of thought, language, identity, and other forms of behaviour’. Second, Dahl believes a country’s ‘record of grievance’, the extent to which its citizens are alienated or allegiant as a result of its record in redressing people’s grievances, to be another important factor. Third, he argues that political divisions derived from social and economic sources, or long-run changes in class, social status, occupation, religion, ethnic group or language social factors, could shape patterns of Opposition. Dahl lists as the fourth factor ‘[s]pecific patterns of attitudes and opinions’, or the ‘*patterns* of cleavage and consensus formed by the ways in which political attitudes are distributed over the population of a country’. Dahl argues, for example, that where ‘unequal salience of opinions on different questions among different opinion-clusters’ and ‘low coincidence’ (where individuals who agree on one question are highly likely to disagree on another) combine, the tendency of political leaders to conciliate and compromise is enhanced as a result of the need to gain majorities in the Congress or the Parliament, although he argues that the tendency is heightened under two-party systems. Fifth, political

polarization, the extent to which the population is divided on political issues, is the final main non-institutional variable cited by Dahl (1966a: 357, 359, 367, 371–381; emphasis in original).

These are all open to question. Taking just the third factor that Dahl cites, changes in socio-economic trends could be seen as highly relevant for our purposes. Some Australian political scientists contest, for example, that the relative decline of Labor's traditional blue-collar worker base, and the 'embourgeoisment' of society—highly simplistic assertions, as we shall see—help explain Labor's rightward drift in the 1980s (see Chap. 8). This resembles Otto Kirchheimer's famous point, made decades earlier, that one of the key factors in the so-called 'waning of Opposition' in Western democracies was the 'emergence of a substantial new middle class of skilled workers, the middle ranks of white-collar people, and civil servants', which contributed to the diminution of social and political polarisation. The rise of the 'consumption-oriented individual of mass society' threatened the *raison d'être* of the ideologically oriented nineteenth century party (Kirchheimer, 1957: 148, 153). Kirchheimer's arguments, however, rest on contestable assumptions: for example, the validity of his point about the rise in the number of white-collar workers depends on whether this constitutes a material reduction in class polarisation, or whether it simply changes the type of work undertaken by a portion of the labour force who essentially remain members of the same class, the same class which, a little over a decade later, put paid to the political scientist's prognostications in a most dramatic fashion by staging some of the largest working class rebellions ever seen in the advanced capitalist world (see Callinicos & Harman, 1987).

On safer ground are recent references to a 'much more intensified pattern of opposition since the late 1990s', highlighted in examples including, but not limited to, the rise of the Tea Party and the Occupy movements in the US on the right and left respectively, as well as the mushrooming of many anti-establishment parties across Europe, whose success owes much to the catastrophic effects of the economic crisis that set in towards the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, coupled with the failure of the establishment parties to challenge neo-liberalism, whose lock-jaw grip on the policies of the self-same parties represents somewhat of a paradox in light of rising Opposition (van Biezen & Wallace, 2013: 293–4; Lavelle, 2014; Gamble, 2009: 1). More than merely the intensification of Opposition, others have argued that, as the number of parties achieving electoral support has risen in many countries—often without their achieving any representation in legislatures—there has been a 'fragmentation' of Opposition, the result being that the line between Opposition and extra-parliamentary Opposition is increasingly fine, potentially leaving Oppositions less well placed to hold governments accountable (Best, 2013). Suffice to say, in almost all of these cases individual Opposition parties have had little control over the events that have thrust them into the spotlight, which is not to say that their strategic and tactical choices have no bearing on what successes there may be (see Appendix).

Dahl's thoughts on the relative weight that should be assigned to the various institutional factors that shape Opposition patterns, which in turn mould strategies and tactics, are not clear. The question as to which are more important—party and

electoral systems and the constitutional structure, or the historical and socioeconomic developments specific to a given polity—is left hanging. Dahl did, however, seem to imply that effects of cultural factors were interrelated with those of party and electoral systems. For example, subculture was more pertinent in the case of Belgium because of the prevalence there of PR, which ‘has been used to guarantee a subculture that it will be represented in parliament’ (Dahl, 1966a: 358).

If anything, many commentators appear to lean toward ascribing greater importance to cultural factors, which tend to be reflected in the nature of the electoral and party systems to which they give rise. The cross-national survey in which Dahl’s aforementioned contributions appear, *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies* (1966), seems to bear this view out, with aspects of politics in countries as diverse as Norway, Sweden, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany possessing characteristics unique to their country, and which have proved stubborn to electoral or constitutional changes (Rokkan, 1966: 73, 74, 79; Stjernquist, 1966: 135; Lorwin, 1966: 147, 148; Daalder, 1966: 219; Kirchheimer, 1966: 239).

Yet, years of cultural heritage can pale into insignificance amidst major political and economic ruptures, which tend to induce the most drastic changes in Opposition behaviour. In one or both of the two world wars, coalition governments of sorts, sometimes comprising erstwhile bitter enemies, and which negated the standard function of the Opposition as a rival and an alternative,¹¹ were formed out of ‘national unity’ in numerous countries, including Sweden, Belgium, Britain, and the Netherlands (Stjernquist, 1966: 123, Lorwin, 1966: 165; Daalder, 1966: 210). In Australia, meanwhile, an Advisory War Council, comprising members of both the government and the Opposition, effectively ran wartime policy in the years between 1940 and 1945 (*The War Cabinet and Advisory War Council*, n.d.). A coalition government was also formed in Britain in 1931 in response to the Great Depression, which produced the miseries of mass unemployment and searing poverty (Punnett, 1973: 406). In Chile, in 1973, the hitherto constitutional Opposition put aside the niceties of bourgeois politics to back the armed overthrow of the democratically elected Allende Government, giving rise to the attendant horrors of the Pinochet years, including the grotesque spectacle of torture carried out at the soccer stadium cum prison camp, Estadio Nacional (Waldstein, 2015). According to one apologist for the coup, all this was defensible because Allende ‘had plunged Chile into the worst social and economic crisis in its modern history’ (Moss, 1973: ii).

By revealing the potentially dramatic impact of changes in the economic environment on Opposition behaviour, this provides grist for the mill for our argument about the collapse of the post-war boom’s enormous ramifications for the Hayden Labor Opposition—and, for that matter, for every other Opposition to follow in its wake.

¹¹In 1915 in the House of Commons, the Leader of the Opposition’s salary was suspended for the lifetime of the Coalition government (Punnett, 1973: 409).

Non-institutional Variables

The preceding discussion highlighted the significant impact on Opposition behaviour potentially flowing from such variables as electoral systems, party systems, and political culture, however defined. It might be construed from this that, under a Westminster-derived system, a Labor Opposition, still reeling from defeat at the polls, might be expected to react, in attempting to regain office, not unlike its conservative predecessor, since both would be subject to the same electoral and party system, constitutional structure, and national political culture. Yet this would ignore the roles of party ideologies and leadership as determinants of Opposition behaviour. The literature indicates that factors such as these can at times be important determinants of what Oppositions do.

One obvious point is that the Opposition's agenda will be set to a considerable extent by the dominant political themes and crises of the day, and to a lesser extent by the issues on which the executive government elects to concentrate. Oppositions are, of course, not bound by the latter, and are free to embrace the notion that 'the world is what we make of it'. But the reality of the comparatively much greater resources in the hands of the Executive means that the crucial political issues will largely be decided for the Opposition, who makes choices 'but not in circumstances of their own choosing', something increasingly true of Labor, which in a growing number of people's eyes is increasingly reactive—if not reactionary—and passive, opting to follow rather than to lead (see Chaps. 12–16 and Appendix), though a certain tailism is apparent even during the Vietnam war years (see Chap. 4).

The influence of ideology and party politics more broadly can be seen in Stjernquist's (1966: 144, 145) suggestion that changes in the party system would alter the political context in Sweden only if there were greater political and ideological differences between the parties. Potter (1966: 29) argued that the British Conservatives' more strident Opposition to the Liberal Government prior to WWI vis-à-vis the Labour Government after WWII was a result of their bipartisanship with the latter on many key issues, including economic planning, tax, rationing, labour, full employment and inflation, and the need for the reorganisation of the coal, rail, and utility industries, with the nationalisation of iron and steel industries being 'the only nationalization measure of the Labor Government to which the Conservatives offered uncompromising opposition'. In the (admittedly much different) case of South Africa, Spence (1997: 531) noted that, as a result of the relative absence of ideological differences between the weak and fragmented Opposition parties and the dominant African National Congress (ANC), the inability of the former to pose as a viable alternative government had not produced the Opposition irresponsibility that might otherwise have been anticipated in such circumstances.¹² Thus, ideological factors jockey for influence with structural ones,

¹²While the South African case can still be classified as a dominant party system, given that in this nominally democratic country the ANC is the only party expected to win government, Langfield notes that its grip on power has been weakening somewhat in recent times, amid the all too

notwithstanding the obvious dialectical relationship between structural pressures and ideology (see further below). For Kirchheimer (1966: 245, 248), a key factor in the secular decline of Opposition in Germany was the Social Democratic Party's (SPD) post-WWII embrace of market economics, which markedly reduced the differences between Germany's two main parties: 'The candidates' fights may be more in the nature of a collision between people obliged to squeeze through the same narrow thoroughfare to punch the clock before 8:45'. Bipartisanship on market economics was found to be a key element in the story of the Beazley Labor Opposition, as well as a significant influence on its adoption of the 'small target' strategy. The conspicuous absence of 'Opposition' to the Howard government was constantly decryd by commentators, particularly in the lead-up to the 2001 federal election.

In addition to ideology, there are many non-institutional causes of variations in behaviour of Oppositions in the British system. An Opposition's course of direction following an electoral defeat, for instance, would be heavily contingent upon its reading of the events preceding its loss of power. Perhaps pertinent to the experience of the Beazley Opposition was Punnett's point that if a party decided that it lost office because voters merely felt that it was 'time for a change', it 'might be tempted to sit back and merely wait for the wind of change to blow it back into office' (Punnett, 1973: 192). Indeed, there may well be cases where Oppositions are simply in the right place at the right time—opportunistically capitalising on the incumbent's fall from grace—giving the lie to Ball's proposition that there is a tidy recipe for victory consisting of such ingredients as, 'fresh faces', 'cohesion', 'visibility', 'efficiency', and 'adaptability' (Ball, cited in Bale, 2015: 61–2). But in the case of the ALP, as we shall see, the National Consultative Review Committee, established post-1996 election defeat by the party's National Executive, rated—incorrectly, as I shall argue—the 'It's Time' factor 'first as a rationalisation for voting against Labor.' Here compounding the 'wind of change' effect described by Punnett was the fact that the FPLP leadership nurtured a very benign view of Labor in power in the 1980s and 1990s—one clearly not shared by the voting public. However, this not only begs the question as to why the people wanted a change in the first place, but also what forces might lead an Opposition to come to terms with its loss of office in such airily complacent fashion. In the case of the Beazley Labor Opposition, the pursuit of a 'small-target' strategy, and a rosy perspective on its years in government, have to be seen in the post-cold war context of the ideological ascendancy of market economics, with all the attendant repercussions for rapidly diminishing policy differences between mainstream political actors. Similarly, Labor's enduring conclusion regarding the Whitlam government—that it had tried

(Footnote 12 continued)

familiar (in the international context) signs of disillusionment with the ruling party, which she argues proves the capacity for strategic choices on the part of the Opposition to change its fortunes, and potentially to undermine a dominant party system (Langfield, 2013: 291). Even more recently there have been signs of the ANC's status as a dominant party coming under considerable challenge (e.g. Laing, 2016).

to do things ‘too quickly’, and must in future temper its ambitions for social change—took shape during a period of economic crisis, which notably dampened the party’s reformist mood.

Similarly, an Opposition’s misreading of a situation in which it is gaining on an incumbent can also distort its behaviour, a prime example being New Labour’s success in Opposition in the mid-1990s in the context of a widely reviled Conservative government. As Marquand (1999, 250) notes, the ‘psephological evidence suggests that New Labour won [in 1997] as Not Conservative rather than as New Labour’. Yet, because New Labour thought—or so it seemed—that its revisionist ‘modernising’ was the cause of its improved performance, Blair sped up the task of bringing New Labour closer to the Conservatives in policy terms, even when it was clear that the Tories were headed for oblivion (Callinicos, 1996, 3).

Party history and ideology have also featured in discussions about the varying styles of Opposition in Britain. British Labour Oppositions are said to be more placid and timid in opposing the government than are their Conservative counterparts. Jennings, for example, argues that, in contrast to the Conservatives, because Labour ‘may be accused of revolutionary tendencies, it must show itself [to be] more strictly constitutional’ than other parties. Other factors account for Labour’s docility in Opposition, according to Jennings, including MPs’ prior experience as trade unionists, which schools them in the art of negotiation; the fact that Labour might view government proposals as ‘instalments of its own policy’, and therefore wish a safe passage for the legislation; and, *inter alia*, because impeding government policies implied ‘long sittings and most Labour members are comparatively poor men who have to live in the cheaper and therefore more remote suburbs, and they cannot afford taxi fares. If a debate is kept up beyond midnight, they miss the last underground trains and omnibuses’ (Jennings, 1957: 179–180). No doubt, some of this data has lost its explanatory power over the years. Perhaps this is less true of Dowse’s emphasis on the representation among Labour MPs of former trade union officials, and the way in which this has led the party to strike a more conciliatory note. His argument’s persuasiveness is undermined, however, by the absence of an explanation for the non-trade union Labour MPs who similarly lacked an appreciation of the need for ‘extreme vigour in opposition’. Perhaps it relates to another ideological factor, that is the ‘the ease with which that party [Labour] has come to be dominated by the theory of responsible opposition’ (Dowse, 1960: 524–525).

Across the aisle, Punnett points to the ‘born to rule’ mentality of the Conservative party, which leads them to think and behave in Opposition as if they still rule the roost. Labor, on the other hand, is a ‘party of dissent and opposition, with a philosophy and attitude to authority that makes it more comfortable in opposition than in office’. Punnett cites Robert Rhodes James’s claim that in Opposition the Conservatives find themselves in unnatural surroundings, and thus are predisposed to division and internal bickering, the chief sacrificial lamb in the wake of defeat usually being the leader. The Labour Party, in contrast, subjects its Leader of the Opposition to ‘regular attack without necessarily wanting to overthrow him’ (Punnett, 1973: 6, 90).

Several commentators point to the tendency for Labour in Opposition to be more vulnerable to the influence of non-leadership elements, ‘extremists’, conferences, the trade unions, and the party machine in general, which in turn leads to greater internal strife compared with the disciplining effects of winning government, when the authority of Cabinet and the parliamentary leadership takes precedence (Powell, 1959: 340, 343; Rose, 1956: 129; Bilski, 1977: 307, 308; Pimlott, 1992: 173, 573, 728). This is why the need for formal disciplinary restraints on Labour members in Opposition is greater compared with when they are in government (Alderman 1968: 124). As has already been noted, this argument was key to explaining the Whitlam Labor Opposition’s susceptibility to the radicalising influences of the anti-Vietnam war movement and the trade unions.

Party leadership appears less important than one might instinctively have thought, even if we reject both the ‘great man’ view of history and the crude structuralism that permits individuals no decisive influence at historical junctures, and come down instead on the side of a methodology that suggests that, while structures do indeed shape individuals in dramatic ways, the actions and decisions of the latter can at crucial points be pivotal to the outcome of events (Barker, Johnson, & Lavalette, 2001). Few would deny, for example, that Tony Blair was influential in pushing Labour down a ‘modernising’ path that drove it further in the direction of Conservative nostrums. On the other hand, Labour’s general direction under his leadership is best understood in the context of the post-cold war era of free market triumphalism, the acceptance of ‘globalisation’ as a constraint on reformist ambition, and an internationally uncertain and downbeat economic environment that undercut the material base of redistributive policies (see Lavelle 2008: Chap. 7). Going back further in time, it has been suggested that, upon assuming the leadership of the Liberal Party, Lloyd George was, unlike his predecessor Asquith, reluctant to adopt the Shadow Cabinet model of Opposition (Punnett, 1973: 414; Turner, 1969: 42, 43). One of his Liberal predecessors, Gladstone, in Opposition after 1885, was similarly disinclined to convene Shadow Cabinet meetings because ‘no one in his senses could covenant to call the “late cabinet” together’ (Turner, 1969: 21).

The lack of importance assigned to leadership in this book as an explanation for the direction of Labor in Opposition is consistent with its absence in the literature relating to the British system, and perhaps beyond. In the British system, but also arguably in the Australian context, it seems unassailable that the autonomy of leadership as a non-institutional variable would be circumscribed by a range of other variables, such as the party’s ideology and constituencies, the historical changes occurring prior to any one leader’s tenure, and the economic forces, such as depressed conditions, that dictate political choices. For Opposition leaders in general, choices would be subject not only to these constraints, but also to the influences of electoral and party systems, the party’s strength in the parliament, political culture, and the constitutional architecture of the polity in question.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined a very wide range of factors that shape Opposition behaviour. While it is safe to conclude that it remains impossible to predict the exact behaviour of any one Opposition, the broader secondary research does offer some insights applicable to the case of the ALP.

To begin with, it is possible to determine the basic strategy of an Opposition. For instance, the Opposition in a majoritarian system such as the one in which the ALP operates will try to dislodge the governing party at the next election through a public campaign, while the Opposition party in a multi-party system in which none is able to govern in its own right will rely on bargaining. Countries with similar electoral systems may produce very different party systems as a result of peculiar historical and cultural factors. The role of ideology and party history will mean that a Coalition Opposition will act differently to that of a Labor Opposition, despite grafting away within the same electoral and party systems, and political culture. Even here, however, unusual events such as war and grave economic crises tend to produce analogous responses—coalition governments—among the different systems.

Other generalisations can be made. Oppositions that agree to work within parliament will be similarly constrained in their choice of options, although, again, extraordinary circumstances can lead to the adoption of unconstitutional methods (in the case of Chile in 1973, for example, support for a military coup). Opposition parties permanently isolated from office, and with a meagre representation in the Parliament, may be more willing to espouse extreme or experimental policies as a result of the unlikelihood of their ever being in a position to have to act on them. Parties with some recent experience of office, and who are on the receiving end of a particularly severe electoral setback, will often be convulsed by infighting, and look to make major policy and organisational change in order to make it look once again 'electable'. What policy and organisational changes are made to achieve this broad objective, however, will be determined to some extent by the wider political and economic context in which they are contemplated, as well as, of course, according to the party's history and ideology.

While no single factor can determine the direction of a Labor Opposition, the research does provide supporting evidence for some of the claims made in the ensuing chapters. For instance, British Labour's tendency in Opposition to be predisposed to extra-parliamentary influences such as trade unions and party conferences mirrors the experiences of the Whitlam Labor Opposition. Modern Labor's cautious and poll-driven approach is only partly a result of the growing dominance of the media over politics. Also, the research reveals that an Opposition's overall direction will in part be determined by the perspective adopted on its period in government, a striking case in point being the post-Whitlam Opposition. It was argued, however, that this was in turn dependent on other political and economic forces shaping that perspective. Kirchheimer's comments about the effects on the quality of Opposition caused by the German SPD's embrace

of market economics could easily have been offered in relation to the Beazley Labor Opposition's acceptance of key tenets of economic rationalism. If the catastrophic electoral defeats suffered by Labor in the 1970s, in conjunction with a very unforgiving assessment of the Whitlam Government, hastened Labor's adoption of 'responsible economic management' this would not be surprising, given the evidence of similar cases cited above. A hint of the importance of changes in the economic environment—regarded as crucial to the directions of all three Labor Oppositions surveyed here—is given by the examples of the formation of coalition government in Britain in 1931 following the onset of economic depression, and by the Chilean Opposition's support in analogous circumstances for the unconstitutional ousting of President Allende.

Despite the value of existing research, it is, not surprisingly, far from adequate in terms of providing a comprehensive explanation of what drives Labor in Opposition. By closely examining in the remainder of the book three separate periods of Labor in Opposition, we hope to extend, reinforce, and supplement what we have learned thus far about the kinds of factors that shape Opposition behaviour.

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Opposition Vanishing

The Australian Labor Party and the Crisis in Elite Politics

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