

## Modernising Menzies, Whitlam, and Australian Elections

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### ABSTRACT

Scholarly accounts of Robert Menzies' electoral success in 1949 and Gough Whitlam's victory in 1972 invariably refer to the respective victors' electoral campaigns. However, the analysis of the campaigns' innovative advertising appeals and techniques in these studies is somewhat simplistic. By comparing and contrasting the organisation and execution of the successful campaigns of 1949 and 1972, I demonstrate how these campaigns helped usher Australian politics into the modern era. More broadly, I highlight how commercial imperatives introduced during these campaigns continue to affect the conduct of electioneering in Australia.

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## Introduction

When the Hansen Rubensohn advertising agency took over the Liberal Party of Australia's (LPA) advertising account in 1947, the firm's head, Solomon 'Sim' Rubensohn, predicted that 'the Agency will become an integral part of the Party's organisation' (Rubensohn 1947). Exceeding Rubensohn's prophecies, parties now spend millions on their publicity campaigns and the machines that produce them. 'Who are the people who supervise the new political machine?' asks Stephen Mills. 'They are pollsters, advertising agents, TV time-buyers, media consultants, computer hackers, psychologists, group discussion leaders, direct-mail writers, lobbyists, Party officials' (1986, p. 3). Advertising agencies have thus become important functionaries in the armies mobilised for electoral victory.

While the advertising industry has left an indelible imprint on the political system, Sally Young nevertheless observes that its impact on Australian politics has received 'only scant attention by scholars' (2002, p. 82). This study seeks to redress that shortcoming by analysing the creation and execution of two key election campaigns in Australia's political history: the LPA victory in 1949 and the Australian Labor Party's (ALP) in 1972. Numerous scholarly accounts have sought to explain why Australians decided to elect a new government in 1949 and 1972. These studies generally attribute the election results to a combination of influences, including party policies, personalities, and a changing national mood. These studies all refer to the respective campaigns' effective forms of appeal as well as their innovative use of media technology. However, they generally restrict their focus to the unique aspects of the two campaigns, thereby overshadowing many of the less obvious yet equally significant developments that also occurred during each campaign. A more detailed examination of both advertising campaigns is therefore required. By comparing and contrasting the successful campaigns of 1949 and 1972, this study not only provides a more accurate image of each advertising campaign; it also complements the existing accounts of the two elections. Moreover, this examination also helps to illustrate the significant debt that contemporary electioneering owes to these historic campaigns.

On the face of it, the ALP's 1972 campaign bears a resemblance to that mounted by the LPA in 1949. As Victoria Braund notes in her survey of political advertising themes, 'the similarities between these two election campaigns are ... quite significant' (1978, p. i). These similarities were not lost on people concerned at the time. Responding to a congratulatory letter from former LPA leader and Australia's longest serving Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, ALP leader Edward Gough Whitlam reveals an unlikely source of inspiration for his rise to power:

You would, I think, be surprised to know how much I feel indebted to your example, despite the great differences in our philosophies. In particular, your remarkable achievement in rebuilding your own party

and bringing it so triumphantly to power within six years has been an abiding inspiration to me (Whitlam 1985, p. 13).

Others have identified more fundamental similarities between the two campaigns. Mills, for example, claims that both are 'insurgency' campaigns. Such campaigns, he observes, feature 'a centralised and disciplined campaign of long-term electronic advertising' (Mills 1986, p. 87).

The emergence of insurgency campaigns correlates closely with the rise, within the political domain, of the pollster, the advertising agent, and the media agent. These media professionals or 'new' machine men were displacing the role that leading party figures had formerly performed in the creation, co-ordination, and execution of electoral publicity. Modern polling techniques and market research were likewise replacing instinct and electoral experience as the creative force behind electoral strategies. 'Thanks to this new range of largely American-derived marketing techniques,' Mills contends, 'Australian politics has changed beyond recognition' (1986, p. 4). This study regards the rise of these new machine men and the changes wrought by their pragmatic approach to electioneering as marking the *modernisation* of Australian politics.

As Mills implies, this conceptualisation of modernisation is frequently confused with the issue of Americanisation. Commenting on this misconception, Margaret Scammell observes that Americanisation 'is rarely defined and too often taken for granted as a catch-all condemnation of image-conscious campaigning' (1995, p. 291). David Swanson and Paolo Mancini identify opposing interpretations of the term. On the one hand, Americanisation can imply 'that adoption of modern campaign methods necessarily results from a desire to emulate US practices, perhaps with overtones of US superiority and power'. Alternatively, it signifies the 'elements of the modern campaign model [that] have emerged in various countries in response to internal developments in those countries, not out of desire to imitate the United States' (Swanson & Mancini 1996, p. 249). Conceding that '[i]t is to be expected that political campaigners around the world will seek to learn lessons from developments in the United States, the global leader in the field,' Scammell adds that 'national political and media systems, cultures, tastes and tolerance of electorates and individual parities and politicians' all affect the way in which these lessons are applied (1995, p. 291). Ralph Negrine and Stylianos Papathanassopoulos similarly advocate the need for a broader perspective. For them, modern political practices are 'responses to problems that derive from the very nature of modernity, rather than some process that is linked to Americanization *per se*' (1996, p. 60).

Pippa Norris identifies the critical importance of communication in modern politics. She argues that 'the major transformation in election campaigns has come less from long-term structural trends or changes in party strategies than from the system of

political communications in the modern campaign' (1997, p. 193). Quentin Beresford further illustrates the impact of these technological developments on political communication. 'The dominance of television,' he writes, 'means [that] selling the message depends on television advertising strategies and [that] campaign politics must obey the "laws" of successful advertising' (1998, p. 24). Echoing Marshall McLuhan's maxim that 'the medium is the message', I seek to explain the modernisation of electioneering in Australia in light of broader developments in the communications field.

It is hardly surprising that Rubensohn, a commercial advertising executive, should already display an awareness of the impact that the medium would have on the message (political or otherwise) in 1947. In its continual quest to convert audiences into consumers, the advertising industry was quick to recognise the potential of new technologies and crafted its commercial messages accordingly. The decision to remodel political campaigns in the style of the commercial advertiser has been a momentous one. This modernisation process directly contributed to the success of Menzies and Whitlam's campaigns in 1949 and 1972. Moreover, the lessons gleaned from these electoral successes continue to inform the way in which contemporary Australian election campaigns are prepared and conducted.

The 1949 and 1972 elections not only represent the beginnings of two definitive eras Australia's political history; they also mark the beginnings of a monumental development in the history of communications and media industries in Australia. Unlike previous analyses of these successful campaigns, this study will examine press advertisements as well as those broadcast on radio and television. Such a comparison will provide a more accurate insight into the way in which both campaigns were conducted. More importantly, this study will help account for current trends in Australian politics. With its emphasis on image, opinion polls and spin doctoring, contemporary Australian politics increasingly resembles the battle between Coca-Cola and Pepsi—two brands are competing for a larger slice of the consumer market. By examining the ways in which the 1949 and 1972 campaigns contributed to the modernisation of Australian politics, this study will demonstrate that the impact of commercial imperatives on Australian politics extends well beyond the creation of a two-page spread or a 30-second spot.

### **Laying foundations for the future**

The organisational triumphs that characterised the 1949 and 1972 election campaigns cannot be understood without reference to the preceding campaigns—those of 1946 and 1969. The experiences and lessons that both parties learned from these failed campaigns would inform their subsequent electoral efforts.

As the newly formed LPA headed for the polls in 1946, some in the party ventured that 'Victory [was] in the air' (Martin 1999, p. 56). On the eve of polling, Menzies was

‘exhausted but optimistic’ (Hancock 2000, p. 68). With Labor concentrating on its wartime achievements, the LPA’s 1946 campaign sought to exploit the waning postwar euphoria. ‘WE WANT fewer forms and MORE REFORMS’, demanded one advertisement (‘We want fewer forms and more reforms’ 1946). Advertisements also targeted housing: ‘[B]y making home building [a] first priority, by encouraging building and free enterprise, the Liberal Party will provide a practical foundation for ample homes and better housing’ (‘In this our land’ 1946). By focusing on everyday hardships, the LPA advertising campaign simultaneously introduced the new party and its platform to the nation. Its overall strategy, however, lacked focus, and the campaign appeared somewhat haphazard. While the LPA emerged from the campaign with three new seats and an increased overall vote, Menzies was ‘devastated’ by the result (Martin 1999, p. 57).

In its post-mortem of the campaign, the LPA Federal Executive reported that ‘a lot yet remains to be done to make the organisation generally, and our electoral organisation in particular, a really efficient machine’ (1946). The division between the party’s state and federal branches, wrote LPA Press Secretary Charles Meeking, was ‘fantastically stupid ... the principle of Federal control of Federal propaganda should be properly established’ (1946). In light of such criticisms, it was decided that the organisational structure of the LPA’s public relations activities would be overhauled. After an extensive search, Sim Rubensohn was approached to take the LPA account. A staunch Labor supporter, Rubensohn had been involved in producing publicity for the Labor party since the late 1920s. During the 1930s and early 1940s, he successfully forged a relationship with the ALP that extended beyond the production of election advertisements. Not only did he prove a successful fundraiser; his agency further ingratiated itself by carrying the ALP’s debt (Groot 2002, p. 145). ‘[O]utraged by the banking legislation’, he defected to the opposition (Casey 1947). As Allan Martin observes, ‘It was a great coup so to steal a march on [Menzies] political rivals’ (1999, p. 75).

Unlike the LPA’s optimistic approach to the 1946 campaign, the ALP entered the 1969 campaign somewhat sombrely. While the party could scarcely do any worse than its abysmal showing in 1966, Whitlam remained cautious. However, as journalist Mungo MacCallum recalls, ‘It quickly became obvious that this was going to be a real campaign’ (2001, p. 182). ALP hopes duly mounted as the campaign gained momentum. Encouraging voters to join ‘the swing to Labor’, Whitlam’s 1969 campaign centred on domestic issues—education, welfare and health (‘Why they changed their minds’ 1969; ‘We plan a better Australia’ 1969). Australia’s stable economy, however, proved a stumbling block. Shifting attention from domestic to international issues, the Liberals gradually capitalised on Labor’s perceived ‘vague’ and ‘not predictable’ foreign policies (Hancock, 2002, pp. 235–41; ‘The voters’ one day of power’ 1969; ‘No disaster either way’ 1969).

Whitlam was far from devastated with his 15-seat gain, contentedly musing that the result 'was rather better than I had expected' (1985, p. 9). Like the LPA in 1946, the ALP in its post-mortem recognised the need for professional public relations experts. However, Labor's lack of co-ordination in 1969 was less obvious. *The Age*, for example, attributed Whitlam's 'success at the polls, at least in part, to his effective campaigning' ('Mauling at the Polls' 1969). Party secretary Mick Young recalls a different scenario: 'The State Secretaries were still arguing about the conduct of the forthcoming national campaign, and fund-raising was non-existent' (1986, pp. 96–97). A well-managed campaign was clearly a necessity. Writing in the aftermath of the ALP's success in 1972, Neal Blewett observed that the party had learnt its lesson: 'Labor's strategic problems for 1972 were described in the contours of [the 1969] narrow electoral defeat' (1973, p. 6).

### **Learning from history**

In view of the criticisms identified in their respective post-mortems, both parties set about improving their electoral machines. Having outperformed the Liberals in electioneering, Whitlam had little desire to poach their agency. At any rate, Rubensohn had already returned to the fold by 1954 and would remain there for the next twenty years. According to Young, improvement was needed at the grassroots level: 'a co-ordinated approach did not require large injections of money, what was more important was a commitment from all in the Party that we were serious about winning ... and ... prepared to organise ourselves accordingly' (Young 1986, p. 98). Such views led to the creation of the National Campaign Committee (NCC). Made up of Whitlam, Young, Federal Publicity Officer David White, and state branch secretaries, the NCC sought to facilitate communication between party leaders. In reality, writes Blewett, the NCC was 'the instrument by which Young secured a formal imprimatur for his campaign planning' (Blewett 1973, p. 10).

After the 1946 loss, the LPA realised that its publicity machine had struggled with loose screws. State divisions remained autonomous, particularly in relation to press advertisements. Advertising generated notable discord since, as Hancock notes, 'control of advertising was about controlling one's affairs' (2000, p. 94). The solution was a Public Relations Conference. Staged in January 1948, it had a centralising function similar to the NCC's, albeit temporarily. State branches only assented to the federal division's proposed arrangement on the proviso that they retain the right of veto over any advertisement (Hancock 2000, p. 91). In a letter to LPA Federal President Richard Casey a year later, the Hansen-Rubensohn agency stressed the importance of a co-ordinated campaign:

We know from experience the tremendous value of co-ordination, on a national basis, of pre-election advertising and public relations campaigns.

We also know the advantages that can be derived when lack of such co-ordination becomes evident in the campaign of one's opponent (1949).

The issue of co-ordination would also have an effect on the ALP's 1972 campaign strategy, though to a lesser degree. In the lead-up to the 1969 election, market research company Marplan had been commissioned by the ALP to poll opinions in selected electorates. '[T]he Marplan exercise,' observes Terence Beed, 'led to a growing faith in the survey research approach' (Beed 1977, p. 227). Young, however, provides a somewhat different account: 'Members ... believed themselves to be experts on everything, and that included judging the mood of the electorate. To have this new fangled science called market research was not easily digested' (1986, p. 98). Appeasing both schools demanded significant compromises.

Party members also brought Rubensohn's suitability into question. Apart from his brief dalliance with the Liberals in 1949, Rubensohn had been working on various ALP campaigns for almost forty years. Young felt that Rubensohn 'really wasn't into this business of going out and polling ... He wanted to tell them what they should think rather than getting their views' (Oakes & Solomon 1973, p. 94). However, Rubensohn's strong links with the party, combined with his fundraising abilities, ensured that Hansen-Rubensohn-McCann-Erikson (HRME) retained the account (Oakes & Solomon 1973, p. 102). That the ALP employed Spectrum International Marketing Services ahead of HRME's research branch reveals both the party's desire to maintain control, and its willingness to compromise (Mills 1986, p. 95). In the successful campaigns of 1949 and 1972, the modernisation of campaign tactics appears to be the result of negotiation rather than an arbitrary imposition from either the party or its advertising agency.

### **The opening salvos**

Modern electoral campaigns prioritise the use of the electronic mass media. 'Mass media,' observe Mancini and Swanson, 'also play a very important role in accentuating the process of personalization'—where personalities are emphasised ahead of policies (1996, p. 6). From the very outset, the 1949 and 1972 campaigns vividly illustrate the degree to which the utilisation of electronic media has affected the *role* of the party in Australian elections.

With Rubensohn on board, preparations for the 1949 LPA campaign were well under way by early 1948. Menzies' wartime 'Forgotten People' speech had displayed his radio prowess. However, it would be the 'John Henry Austral' radio programs that would become the key weapon in his campaign arsenal (Ward 1999). Described as 'part satire, part serial, part soap box', the famed broadcasts aired throughout Australia between July 1948 and November 1949 (Mills 1986, p. 90). During each fifteen-minute episode, Austral discussed topical issues and everyday problems to 'draw out some broader political moral' (Mills 1986, p. 90). A second program,

'Country Quiz', served a similar function. Although expensive, the programs enabled the LPA to maintain a continual presence in the nation's political consciousness.

During the 1946 campaign, Labor advertising had targeted Menzies ('A leopard cannot change its spots' 1946). His image remained a concern for the LPA's publicity men: 'The illusion that he is the champion of the "moneybags", the aloof ... cynic could ... be dispelled by a discreet, well conceived public relation of a personal character' (Hansen-Rubensohn Co. 1949). Advertising subsequently projected Menzies as an average hardworking family man with an active interest in sport and the welfare of the nation (Hancock 2000, p. 93; Martin 1999, pp. 105, 115; 'How Well do You know this Man?' c.1949). This 'concerted campaign to construct a positive and accessible image' of Menzies, observes Bridget Griffen-Foley, 'was to mark a new high point in the cult of personality in Australian politics' (2003, p. 35).

Like Menzies', Whitlam's electoral campaign began well in advance of the actual polling date. Fearing that the new Liberal leader, William McMahon, would call a snap election, the ALP launched its so-called 'mini-campaign' in October 1971. As with the John Henry Austral broadcasts, the 'mini-campaign' sought to establish a continuing presence for the Opposition. A \$20,000 donation to the ALP provided what Young described as an opportunity 'to explain the positive side of our policies, to counter the feeling that we were carping and negative' (Young 1986, p. 107). Whitlam would discuss a specific issue in each capital city, with media reports providing free exposure for the party. Not everything ran to plan—Whitlam inadvertently upset the unions on the opening day by announcing that individual unionists would be fined \$20 if they breached industrial agreements ('Unions wary of fines' 1971). Braund nevertheless observes that the mini-campaign 'did a lot of good for the party by exposing issues and problems which were better faced in late 1971 than just before an election' (1973, p. 20). Furthermore, the campaign had attracted an estimated \$1.25 million worth of free publicity (Braund 1973, fn. 5).

Market research found that Whitlam's public image, like that of pre-1949 Menzies, required treatment. Interviewees variously described him as 'cold', 'in the wrong party', and 'distant' (Young 1986, pp. 104–105). During the mini-campaign, the leader's new hairstyle attracted significant public attention. Alongside a report detailing the reactions to the ALP's industrial policy, the *Sydney Morning Herald* incongruously featured photographs of 'the two Whitlams'—'the new, longer, looser hair style' and the 'old slick down model' ('Unions wary of fines' 1971). A more concerted attempt to improve Whitlam's public image would occur during the campaign proper.

### **It's time to campaign**

Having spent fortunes in the lead-up to their respective campaigns, it was now time for Menzies and Whitlam to capitalise on their solid foundations. As the polling date



neared, both campaigns reverted to more traditional forms of electioneering. Significantly, this final stage of each campaign also reveals the impact that the respective electronic advertising strategies had had on the broader campaign.

Prior to the 1949 election, LPA publicity targeted Chifley's attempted nationalisation of the banking industry. Advertisements suggested that this was the tip of the iceberg:

The question is whether ... you are to subject your life, your job, your business and your private affairs to the scrutiny and dictation of Canberra officials, or whether you want to see the restoration of responsible parliamentary government with Australia predominantly a country of free enterprise ('Socialism or a free Australia' 1949).

Although the state divisions continued to produce their own press advertisements, the entire party was united in its fervent opposition to socialism. Identifying socialism as a threat to the 'spiritual, mental and physical future' of Australian families, one advertisement explained why the 'case against socialism is a deadly one':

THE SOCIALIST DOCTRINE HAS LOST ALL SPIRITUAL CONTENT ... THE REAL FREEDOMS ARE TO WORSHIP, TO THINK, TO SPEAK, TO CHOOSE, TO BE AMBITIOUS, TO BE INDEPENDENT ... SOCIALISM MUST MEAN THE REDUCTION OF HUMAN FREEDOM ('The case against socialism is a deadly one' 1949).

This socialist scourge was the very antithesis of the domestic idyll that Menzies had championed in his famed 'Forgotten People' speech. His claim that 'the class war must always be a false war' (Menzies 1942, p. 5), during the same speech, can similarly be discerned in Figure 1 ('Class warfare, class hatred' 1949). For Menzies, most Australians were middle class—their values and beliefs formed the 'backbone of the nation'. Any threat to the middle class was a threat to the nation. The 'MAIN ISSUE,' one advertisement declared, 'is YOUR WAY OF LIFE' ('This is the Liberals' policy ...' 1949).

To broaden the party's appeal and dissociate itself from its 'moneybags' tag, the LPA actively pursued unionist votes. 'Legitimate' trade unions were separated from illegitimate and subversive communists. 'We will OUTLAW the COMMUNISTS,' clamoured one advertisement, 'because we are pledged to support decent Australian trade unionism ... because we have undertaken to introduce the secret ballot – which communists oppose' ('We will outlaw communists' 1949). Other advertisements combined emotional ideological appeals with practical promises ('Why every unionist should vote Liberal' 1949).

Figure 1.

THE SOCIALIST LABOR PARTY  
AND THE COMMUNISTS  
BOTH PREACH THE SAME  
LOATHSOME DOCTRINE

**CLASS WARFARE**  
**CLASS HATRED**

IT IS THEIR TOOLS OF TRADE  
THEIR WAY TO POWER.

**LIBERALS** Do NOT believe in "CLASS"

**LIBERALS** Preach the Doctrine of—

**ONE PEOPLE**  
**ONE NATION**

CO-OPERATION AND CONCILIATION IS THE ONLY WAY  
TO DEVELOP A FREE AND DEMOCRATIC NATION

VOTE FOR THE

**LIBERAL AND COUNTRY PARTY**

Figure 2.

# WHAT DOES A WOMAN WANT FROM LIFE?

## *THIS?* OR *THIS?*

Marriage to a man who, under the socialist system, will work where the Government tells him to work . . . and whose children's opportunities will depend upon the requirements of the State.

Government supervision and direction of every phase of family life—housing, education, medical treatment, occupation and family spending. Government control of family savings through a "nationalised" banking system. Dependence upon the Government for the same kind of so-called "security" which you and your family would "enjoy" if they entered an institution.

**THAT IS WHAT  
SOCIALISM MEANS**

Happy marriage to a man securely established in work of his own choosing . . . an attractive home of your own . . . rising family income with a reasonable cost of living . . . opportunities for the children . . . ability to save for the future.

A chance for your husband to make his own way in life without having to lean on the Government except in unavoidable necessity.

Freedom to manage your own family life without interference from Government officials. Independence . . . prosperity.

**THAT IS WHAT  
LIBERALISM MEANS**

**IT IS FOR YOU TO DECIDE**

**vote Liberal**  
**FOR BETTER LIVING**

Attracting female voters was one of Menzies' priorities. The threats outlined by the 'case against socialism' advertisement illustrate how the LPA exploited symbols and arguments that were 'central ... to many women's understanding of their experience' (Brett 1993, p. 56). Figure 2 deliberately evokes this imagery, identifying freedom and independence with the family and its spiritual and material prosperity ('What does a woman want from life?' 1949).

Identifying Menzies and the LPA was the first stage in attracting middle-class support. Rubensohn deemed the second stage to be the 'unselling' of Chifley and Labor. This sentiment was encapsulated in the slogan adopted by the LPA's NSW division—'It's Time for a Change'. Chifley's insistence that Labor campaign on its past record played straight into the LPA's hands ('Labor stands for people' 1949). Although this appeal had worked in 1946, vague promises would not work twice. Significantly, the backward-looking campaign failed to enthuse the new generation of voters (Crisp 1960, p. 371).

Labor's campaign received a battering. Headed 'CHIFLEY STANDS ON HIS RECORD', one LPA advertisement cited examples of the government's ineptitude before concluding: 'A TRAGIC RECORD INDEED – FOR AUSTRALIA!' ('Chifley stands on his record' 1949). Looking forward, LPA advertisements promised to 'reduce living costs and increase real wages', and to improve social services for all Australians ('The cost of living must be reduced' 1949; 'The real facts about workers' welfare' 1949; 'Australian women!' 1949). Appealing to the many young couples who were putting up with cramped living arrangements, the LPA promised to deliver the great Australian dream—'Homes and Home Ownership at Reasonable Cost' ('Australian women!' 1949). Where Chifley drably offered nothing new, Menzies and the LPA were offering every Australian a highly appealing slice of middle-class suburbia.

### **It's time ... again**

'It's Time', the ubiquitous slogan of Whitlam's 1972 campaign, was devised by HRME's account executive Paul Jones (Oakes & Solomon 1973, p. 94). While ALP insiders were immediately drawn to the simple slogan, it required testing before it could be used. The research report was heartening:

'It's Time' gives indications of being a successful slogan ... It is achieving its objective of providing a subtle, low key lead for the troubled thoughts of voters, but at the same time avoiding any sniff of panic on Labor's part (Oakes & Solomon 1973, p. 95).

Shorter than the LPA's 1949 slogan 'It's Time for a Change', 'It's Time' was a paradoxical statement. Jones regarded the slogan's ambiguity as its key strength:

You say It's Time and they'll fill in what it's time for ... It's Time to stop strikes, fix education, whatever is important to the individual. There's nothing to disagree with. It's the perfect statement (Maxwell 1973, p. 30).

The campaign encouraged Australians to reach the 'correct' conclusion by themselves.

The NCC's three-stage campaign initially involved the popularisation of the party's slogan. 'It's Time' appeared everywhere, from car stickers to matchboxes (Blewett 1973, p. 14). As the campaign proper hit full speed, 'It's Time' T-shirts could be seen clinging to bodies anywhere from the front cover of *The Bulletin* to the front window of the Sportsgirl clothing store on Collins Street (*The Bulletin* 1972; 'Politically, he's window dressing' 1972).

The second phase was the 'soft-sell' campaign. A 'song with hit qualities' was created, from which a single stanza would be incorporated into a television commercial (Blewett 1973, p. 14). The result, the famed 'It's Time' commercials, were the centrepiece of the campaign. These energetic commercials featured various celebrities singing the 'It's Time' song. Fearing that this 'razzamatazz' would harm the image of the candidates, party leaders kept Labor politicians out of the commercials (Barnes 1972). They similarly rejected the proposal that the commercials feature 'all sorts of well-known people from all walks of life' (Braund 1973, p. 21).

The commercial targeted those who had eluded the ALP in 1969—young working-class housewives and first-time voters. Like the LPA in 1949, the ALP understood the significance of this new generation. However, it was a more affluent age, and appeals to security or material prosperity lacked their former resonance. Jones thus argued that the ALP needed to engage their target audience's desires:

We'll show ... ['It's Time' commercials] to women, to housewives, all afternoon, every afternoon. We'll have their favourite TV stars sing them (they're the people whose opinions they really value) ... [A]nd we'll sock it to the kids, too ... The kids are the fashion leaders. If they dig, a lot of older groups dig (Maxwell 1973, p. 31).

Shots of Whitlam were interspersed among shots of these 'groovy' entertainers. Now that Whitlam's hair was no longer an issue, the ALP could concentrate on improving his image. Like Menzies, Whitlam was portrayed as a family man, a man of the people, and a modern, hardworking leader. These shots also reinforced the party's policies. Referring to the party's education policy, the verse 'time for children / time to teach them / it's time it was free' featured a photograph of Whitlam surrounded by schoolchildren. This strategy was an adaptation of a similar technique that had featured in the ALP's 1969 press advertising campaign (Ward 2001, p. 11).

Figure 3.

# Our education plan will put thirty kids in classrooms designed for thirty kids. Too bad kids can't vote.



Until recently, the Commonwealth Government abandoned the problems of education to the States.

When protesting parents, teachers, State Governments and Australian Labor Party Members were finally heard in Canberra, the Liberal-Country Party Government handed out a few million dollars and hoped, possibly even prayed, that the problem would go away.

The problem is still there for State and Catholic schools.

#### Australian Schools Commission

The only rational approach is firstly to define the problem in detail. The Australian Labor Party will immediately establish an Australian Schools Commission to determine just what the priorities are. It will report of the needs of all schools and all students—from textbooks to technical scholarships.

## It's time. Vote **1** Australian Labor Party

#### Emergency Funds

While the Commission was sitting we would grant emergency funds to cope with our known problems in the shortest possible time: to increase the number and quality of teachers, to reduce the size of classes, to improve the standard of all school buildings and equipment, and to increase the types and level of financial assistance to all students.

#### Pre-School Education

We would also establish a Pre-School Commission. Not to analyse the problem of pre-schools. In most States pre-schools are virtually non-existent. But to define the aims and needs of pre-school education for every Australian child . . . without charge.

#### Total Education Plan

The Australian Labor Party's programme is far-sighted and far-reaching. It covers problems like teacher training, books and equipment for aboriginal children and migrant children and handicapped children. It shows how the Australian Labor Party would provide free tertiary education, establish an open University, set up further tertiary institutions in small and urban regions.

We know it's going to be expensive . . . but how many better ways can you think of to spend our money?

If you want to know more of the details, please ask your Australian Labor Party Member or Candidate for our Education Brochure . . . it's quite an education.



Authorised by M. J. Young, 39 Alinga Avenue, Canberra, A.C.T.

Negating the 'It's Time' slogan was a difficult task. Braund describes the Liberal response, 'Not Yet', as a 'monumental mis-choice of a negative answer' (Braund 1973, p. 27). In terms of style, energy, and passion, Liberal advertisements were the antithesis of the ALP campaign. References to defence and freedom thus appeared worn and tired ('Mr Whitlam' 1972; 'Labor's incredible jobs-for-the-boys machine' 1972). The Liberals' publicity machine remained divided between federal and state divisions (McLean & Brennan 1973, pp. 206–207). Less obvious mistakes also occurred, such as the claim that Liberal candidates were in fact 'younger' than their ALP opponents. References to the ALP and the image it was cultivating only served to underscore the pervasiveness of its campaign ('Gough would love a team like mine' 1972).

The 'soft-sell' strategy gradually gave way to the third and final stage of the campaign—the 'hard sell'. Eight further television commercials (which also doubled as radio advertisements) discussed foreign ownership, education, inflation, unemployment, health, social welfare, strikes, decentralisation and national development (Ward 2001, p. 11; Braund 1973, p. 23). Press advertisements also appeared. As with the television and radio commercials, they had been developed well in advance of their publication. Unlike the electronic commercials, the press campaign won few accolades. An adjunct of the existing electronic campaign, these press advertisements featured the same issues as the latest television commercials, though in greater depth. Bearing the echoes of Jones' comments regarding 'kids' as the fashion leaders, Figure 3 clearly outlines the ALP's policies on education ('Our education plan' 1972).

While some of Labor's old school machine men felt out of their depth with the slick 'It's Time' commercials, press advertising was a different matter. These 'old' machine men not only had a long-running association with press advertising, they also knew exactly what their policies were and how they should best be sold. Politicians, observes Blewett, were 'more ready to challenge the expertise of the agency over printed matter than over television production' (Blewett 1973, pp. 14–15).

The most contentious aspect of the press campaign did not concern policy; in line with the rest of the campaign, it concerned appearances. Featuring white type on a black background, these wordy advertisements were difficult to read. John Singleton thus mused, 'A vote for the Labor Party is a vote for 20/20 vision' (1972). The widespread condemnation of the press advertisements forced a rethink of the series.

Such criticisms reveal a flaw in the ALP's tightly organised campaign—it lacked flexibility. A spate of late donations, however, enabled it to develop new advertisements for the final week of the campaign. The ensuing 'days to go' advertisements were clear and straightforward. In contrast to Figure 3, Figure 4 is easy to read ('Two days to go' 1972). Each advertisement succinctly stated the ALP's policies on 'the real issues'—first education, then welfare, national development, and finally housing. The advertisements suggested that *everyone*—not just traditional ALP supporters—would benefit under an ALP government.

Figure 4.

# Two days to go...

## The real issue Housing

100,000 AUSTRALIANS WAIT ON STATE HOUSING  
600,000 rent payers can't wait

*With Housing:*

*Labor helps* All home buyers—not only those in first home

*Labor helps* All age groups—not only those under 35

*Labor helps* All wage earners—under \$280 income a week

### LABOR PROVIDES

\$4,166 benefit on average 25-year housing loan

Liberals provide \$1,375.

### LABOR PROVIDES

No time limit on loans

Liberals scheme over 10 years only.

BENEFITS AUTOMATIC WITH TAX RETURN

# It's time!

Vote **1**

## Australian Labor Party

Authorized by M. J. Young, 39 Alameda Avenue, Canberra, A.C.T.



Figure 5.



The fact that the 'It's Time' slogan was a little bigger in each successive advertisement added a sense of urgency to the campaign. In Figure 5, the final instalment, the slogan occupies almost a quarter of the advertisement. By the beginning of December, 'Time' had finally arrived ('Join us ... it's time' 1972). Interestingly, Figure 5 reverts to the 'soft-sell' technique on the day before polling. The image underscores the popularity of Whitlam and, indeed, his cause. Steve McLean and Paul Brennan may well have had this final instalment in mind when they note that the series 'gave the general impression that "it's all over bar the shouting"' (McLean & Brennan 1973, p. 208). In terms of the ALP's long-running election campaign, it certainly was.

## Conclusion

In 1949 and again in 1972, the notoriously conservative Australian electorate decided that it was time for a change. Its reasons for doing so are not entirely clear. It would be foolish to attribute these victories entirely to the efforts of advertising men like Rubensohn and Jones. Tacitly underscoring the similarities between the two campaigns, Young could well have been speaking for Menzies as well as Whitlam when he reflected:

It seems to have entered the popular mythology that a slick marketing campaign ... enabled Whitlam and the Labor Party to capture the imagination and approval of a nation increasingly disenchanted with a fumbling, ineffectual and disintegrating government. There is an element of truth in those assertions. What is so often forgotten, however, is the tremendous physical and intellectual effort that had been expended ... laying the groundwork for the 1972 victory (Young 1986, p. 92).

Analyses of the 1949 campaign have variously identified Chifley's treatment of the economy, the coal strike, the dollar crisis, the redistribution of seats in the expanded Parliament, and petrol rationing as the cause/s of the LPA victory (Lee 1994; Hughes 1978). Menzies himself attributed victory to the banking issue and the socialist scourge. 'No single factor,' he later declared, 'did more to bring about our victory in 1949' (Menzies 1970, p. 110).

The 1972 result has generated similar conjecture. David Butler (1973) provides a plethora of reasons for the election result—from the rejuvenated state of the ALP to the Liberals' mismanagement of economic issues. Geoffrey Bolton (1996, p. 213) and Hughes (1973, p. 25) both suggest that the Liberals failed to offer a vision on the big issues. A Liberal insider blamed LPA members' age, the party's tired and ineffective appeals (a somewhat ironic choice given the claims featured in certain Liberal advertisements), and its silence on economic questions (Laurence 1973). *The Age* was somewhat more idealistic, claiming that the electorate 'Has voted Labor because it believes Australia is a fortunate country with a superb opportunity to span the gap

between an old world of grittiness and greed and a new world of decency and humanity' ('Elected to serve us all' 1972).

Although Oakes and Solomon's post mortem of 1972 identifies similar causes, they nevertheless found it difficult to ignore the advertisements:

Why did Australians change their Government [?] ... To say they did so because they thought it was time for a change seems too slick, too easy. Yet that was the reason given by a majority of people who had switched their vote to Labor when they were interviewed by a survey team in Sydney on polling day (Oakes & Solomon 1973, p. 312).

Without an equivalent doorstep study, it is difficult to gauge the impact of the LPA's advertising campaign in 1949. However, if pollster Roy Morgan was any judge, it seems that the tactic of 'sticking to the one issue: socialism' certainly played an influential role in the electorate's decision in that election (Martin, 1999, p. 126). Further support can be gleaned from Chifley, who blamed 'the constant barrage over the radio and in the press whereby the Opposition succeeded in linking communism with [Labor in] the minds of a percentage of the middle class' (Freudenberg 2001, p. 89). While this was perhaps a case of shooting the messenger, Chifley's claim nevertheless underscores the importance of an effective and well-orchestrated campaign.

The campaigns mounted by the successful parties in 1949 and 1972 stand out because they introduced Australian politics to modern campaign techniques. Their most obvious contribution to this process was their innovative use of technology. It is hardly surprising that Menzies' radio programs and Whitlam's 'It's Time' commercials still remain synonymous with their respective victories. Less evident, though no less important, were the organisational structures underpinning these campaigns. The previous elections had underscored the need for a united party and a campaign machine. Having been identified as a weakness in the respective parties' failed campaigns in 1946 and 1969, the issue of leadership would characterise the subsequently successful publicity campaigns in 1949 and 1972.

The 1949 and 1972 campaigns also mark the arrival of modern electoral campaigning strategies in Australia. While both campaigns made innovative use of the electronic media, their respective dependence upon it is illustrative of the degree to which electioneering had been modernised. The LPA's 1949 campaign was not entirely dependent upon radio broadcasts. Although somewhat disjointed, press advertising remained the primary outlet for explaining key issues. By 1972, the electronic media had clearly relegated press advertising to a subordinate position. While the mad scramble to improve the press advertisements demonstrates the ongoing importance of traditional media outlets, the campaign's overall success (in spite of this struggle) underscores the centrality of the electronic media in modern campaigns.

The two campaigns also reveal some of the inherent problems this modernisation process throws up. Observing that 'It's impossible ... to gauge the real impact of the Austral broadcasts on the voter of the time,' Helen O'Neil and Stephen Mills claim that 'it is clear they broke new ground and posed early questions about the role of broadcasting in the electoral process' (1986, p. 331). Deftly exploiting the strengths (and weaknesses) of radio as a broadcast medium, the LPA's 'John Henry Austral' broadcasts frequently featured impersonations of Labor leaders. To undermine the broadcasts, Chifley legislated against the impersonation of political figures in on-air political advertisements. However, this imposition of a 'truth in advertising' requirement was ultimately an exercise in futility. '[P]olitical advertising,' claims Henry Mayer, 'is necessarily full of deception, half-truths, exaggerations and falsities ... Politics does not deal with "products" which can be checked and evaluated in the way a car can be' (1994, p. 119). The commercial advertising agents working on the LPA campaign consequently found little difficulty in 'reconditioning' their broadcasts to make sure they would avoid prosecution. Publicists and 'spin doctors' have continued to exploit this loophole for political gain.

While the broadcasts were a new weapon in the LPA's campaign arsenal, they did not alter the overall conduct of the campaign. Despite its modernised aspects, Menzies' campaign maintained numerous pre-modern strategies—including the local canvassing of opinions, local meetings, and (in part) locally produced advertisements. In terms of the entire strategy, the contribution of public relations professionals seems somewhat marginal. In contrast, the ALP's embrace of television transformed its entire electioneering strategy. The 'It's Time' television commercials were the campaign's centrepiece. The mini-campaign, the Blacktown campaign launch and Whitlam's television appearances all served to underscore the medium's primacy in the overall campaign (Ward 2001, pp. 10–11).

Since 1972, the commercial style of political advertising has become a necessity in any modern campaign. This development has had a dramatic impact on Australian elections. The funds required to mount a television advertising campaign have served to entrench the established parties. With public funding distributed on the basis of a party's performance at the previous elections, the position of the major parties is almost immovable. In 1998, for example, the ALP was able to spend \$9.1 million on its advertising campaign, while the incumbent LPA spent \$7.1 million. The Democrats' \$541,000 almost pales into insignificance; even more so the Greens' paltry \$16,000 (Lawson 2001). While minor parties have demonstrated that electoral success is not entirely dependent upon advertising, they nevertheless remain marginalised in a system where advertising plays such an important role. Similarly, while established parties understand that paid advertisements in themselves do not guarantee electoral success, they remain reluctant to retreat from their current levels of advertising. O'Neil and Mills observe that this has meant that 'being seen to advertise is perhaps as important as the content of advertising' (1986, p. 337).

The growing dependence on television advertising has also altered the parties' promises. Short, catchy and ambiguous, the 'It's Time' slogan (and, to a lesser degree, the advertisements themselves) were perfectly suited to the requirements of commercial television and its audiences. Commercial television has not only required the parties to simplify their message; it has also forced their messengers to spruce up their physical appearance. Weight is lost, teeth are whitened, and eyebrows are willingly plucked in an effort to look good for the camera. Ian Ward and Ian Cook observe that 'televised political advertising is ... intended to have people make political choices on grounds other than reason' (1992, p. 25). Underscoring the commercial agencies' impact upon Australian politics, it seems that audiences are now urged to elect governments in the same way that they select shampoos. This cannot be regarded as an altogether positive development for democracy in Australia. However, as the interpretations of the 1949 and 1972 elections demonstrate, it is wrong to claim that voters base their decisions on advertising alone.

The increased focus on the leaders during the election period has also encouraged the use of negative advertising to discredit the opponent. While Young notes that negative advertising is hardly new to Australia, its increase is nevertheless emblematic of the modernisation of Australian political campaigning techniques (2003, p. 10). This development has attracted significant criticism. Phillip Adams, for example, laments the emergence of elections 'where strident, cacophonous and frequently absurd commercials will undermine voters' confidence in our political system' (1994, p. 48). Others, however, note that such complaints are somewhat simplistic. Scammel, for example, argues that negative advertising encourages debate and can highlight flaws that may have otherwise been overlooked (1995, p. 293). To this end, modern political advertising serves an important role in developing a critical awareness of politics among voters. Whether it was time for a change or just time, the campaigns waged by Menzies and Whitlam's machine men heralded the emergence of an irreversible development in the way that Australian politics is both conducted and observed.

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