

Australian Election Campaign Cartooning—1983 to 2004

Haydon Manning

Cartoons offer a marvellous means of chronicling any election campaign through their capacity to provide a compact and pungent summary of, and commentary on, issues, events and characters. Graphic islands in a sea of words, political cartoons frequently capture a campaign's ebb and flow. Certainly they can over-simplify complexity, but they can also cut through the persiflage that is particularly abundant during campaigns. The editors of this collection have been analysing the cartoons in Australian federal campaigns since 1996¹, so it is time to present some broader observations about election cartooning in this country. In each campaign since 1996 we have collected the bulk of cartooning in metropolitan and some regional newspapers, and from 1983 to 1993 we have collected cartoons from the major broadsheets, the *Australian*, *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald*. The question that underlies our campaign cartoon research, and which we are addressing directly here, is: If cartoons provide a distinctive window on a campaign, what is the nature of that window, and what can one see through it?

Cartoons are distinctive in newspapers because of their mixture of images and words, because of their licence to be satirical, comic, and even outrageous, and because they seek to present an outsider, 'ordinary voter' perspective on politics and society. In recent Australian campaigns, cartoonists have focused almost overwhelmingly on the Party leaders from the Liberals and the ALP (minor parties are nearly invisible in election cartoons). They are

clearly irritated by the caution and spin of modern campaigning and do not always, as a group, tell the received story of the campaign as narrated by the press gallery and the major opinion writers. Neither do they always reflect public opinion on particular issues, but they do tend to reflect the underlying public opinion that politicians are all duplicitous vote-buyers and hypocrites. Consequently, if they have a fault, it is that they tend to fall a little too automatically into the Tweedledum-and-Tweedledee model of representing leaders in campaigns. Several cartoonists we have talked to over the years describe election campaigns as constrained, even slightly dull, times to work, because of a responsibility to be balanced that pervades the media, and also because politicians tend to be especially disciplined and bland in their statements. This state of disciplined blandness in Australian electoral politics clearly has something to do with our compulsory and preferential system of voting, and I will explore how cartoons reflect this towards the end of this chapter.

Initially, this chapter will illustrate how a cartoon can reflect the mood of an entire campaign, by choosing one from each campaign since 1983. While not strictly a 'best of' selection, these cartoons express a particular illustrative power, rather than the full range of qualities cartoons can have—the aim is to show the particular value of cartoons for compactly and pleasantly conveying political history. What is common to the election cartoon is a stand the cartoonists take: siding with voters against the spin of the prime minister and Opposition leader. If you like, they take up the 'citizens' perspective' on the policy sales campaign and efforts by incumbent governments to 'scare' voters into sticking by the status quo. Cartoonists tend to be idiosyncratic campaign spectators, forever keen to present an undisciplined, amusing and critical view of the leaders and their campaign strategists' best endeavours to conjure a compelling 'policy' or pithy slogan.

A common theme found in election cartoons is the level of impatience cartoonists express with the political classes' debasement of national political life at a time when democracy takes centre stage. The remainder of the chapter will focus on this and other themes, and will provide a gallery of election cartoons that should illustrate their value as a means for remembering and comparing different campaigns.

Cartoonists have little control over how they are understood by their readership, nor is it easy to gauge the impact of cartoons on

public perceptions of the campaign. It is clear to us that cartoonists do not generate substantial shifts of public opinion in a campaign, but there are various forms of impact that we can point to. Colin Seymour-Ure is correct when he observes that: 'For so graphic a medium, its appreciation is paradoxically private, for it depends heavily on the readers' imagination'.² Even very imaginative readers are seldom shifted from pre-existing opinions by a single cartoon, speech, advertisement, article, interview, or other part of the media that bombard voters during campaigns. Satire is no silver bullet. It is, however, an intriguing part of the fabric of electoral politics that, at the very least, provides considerable power to illuminate what is happening once the writs have been issued.

Part I—Nine elections: the briefest of chronicles

Every campaign has a set of core issues around which the rival leaders and their parties attempt to pitch for our vote. Cartoons offer a particularly useful means for remembering past campaigns and, in this respect, serve as useful adjuncts for political historians. One cartoon can recall the central issue of a campaign with a compelling economy, as illustrated in the following gallery.

1983



'Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser caught with his pants down',
Ron Tandberg, *Age*, 4 February 1983

The 1983 election was about personalities rather than policies. Owing to the recession and drought of the early 1980s, the Coalition had not much of a record to run on and little but fading memories of the Whitlam government to attempt to spread fear in the electorate. Labor ran on a promise of consensus rather than a detailed platform (or at least a platform anyone can remember, given that they shredded it within months of attaining power and being confronted with a fiscal disaster approaching the nation). Malcolm Fraser hoped to lock in a battle with Bill Hayden as leader, and missed by a few hours. The Tandberg cartoon above illustrates how amusing caricature, combined with a suitable caption, may act to define public opinion or even set a tone for campaigning. This cartoon argues that, from the outset, the campaign was effectively over. Fraser was certainly ‘caught with his pants down’ when, during his late morning visit to the Governor General’s residence to request the dissolution of parliament, Labor met and decided to replace Bill Hayden with Bob Hawke. Fraser lost the election and this prescient cartoon, set alongside the *Age*’s front page banner headlines, captured poignantly what thousands of words of commentary also conveyed, namely that Fraser was in trouble. Nothing much changed between then and 5 March.

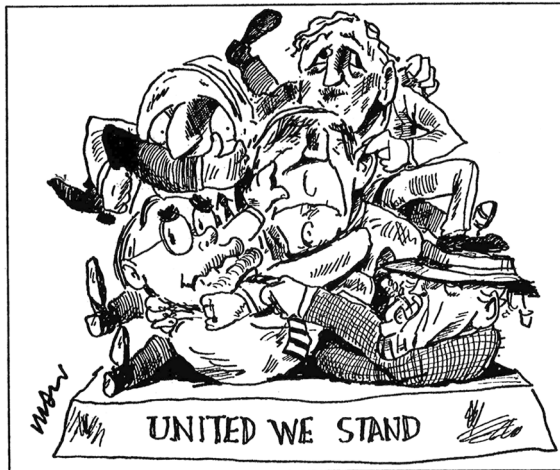
1984



‘Big business overjoyed with the Hawke government’, Alan Moir, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 November 1984

Alan Moir's cartoon captures well the transition, some would say betrayal³, of Labor policy during the first two years of the Hawke Labor Government. With Treasurer Paul Keating, Prime Minister Hawke convinced Labor to abandon traditional and heartfelt Labor policies such as heavy regulation of banking, opposition to new uranium mines, support for real wage increases and scepticism toward the nation's alliance with the United States. Hawke sought an early election believing that his high personal popularity in the polls and this 'new Labor' approach would easily win his government a popular mandate and, in the process, quell rumblings from within the Party's left wing faction. With the business community and the major media outlets largely supportive of his government, these were reasonable suppositions. The interesting factor lay with the election outcome, which saw Labor's first preference vote fall by four per cent, contrary to Hawke's expectation of a landslide. Moir's cartoon might explain why this occurred: the voters were less convinced by the new ALP than was the big end of town.

1987



'John Howard wrestling with fellow conservatives',
Alan Moir, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 June 1987

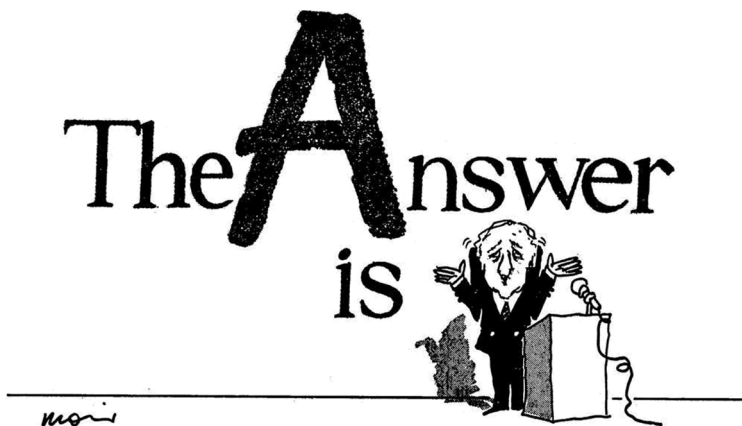
John Howard's first attempt to secure the prime ministership failed amid disunity within Coalition ranks, most notably the infamous

'Joh for Canberra' push which crippled his campaign from the outset. Alan Moir manages to capture this in a simple cartoon that reminds us of a time when the political luck favoured Labor.

Here we view Howard wrestling with National Party members Ian Sinclair (centre frame), Joh Bjelke-Petersen (lower right) and coming in over the top, Andrew Peacock. They were all so busy arguing about who got to sit on top of the Coalition wall that they forgot the fate of Humpty Dumpty.

1990

The 1990 election campaign illustrates, amply, the problem Opposition leaders confront when there are doubts over their personal capacity to lead. Standing out among the many cartoons lampooning Liberal leader Andrew Peacock is Alan Moir's unmasking the possible hollowness of his time as leader. The Liberals' election slogan in 1990 was 'The Answer is Liberal', which presented Alan Moir with an opportunity to devastatingly underscore the widely held view that Peacock lacked substance. Equally memorable, perhaps, was the incumbent Treasurer Paul Keating's comment when Peacock returned to the Liberal leadership, that 'a soufflé doesn't rise twice'.⁴ While many factors explain any election outcome, this question mark over his 'substance' resonated in 1990 at a time when Hawke Labor should

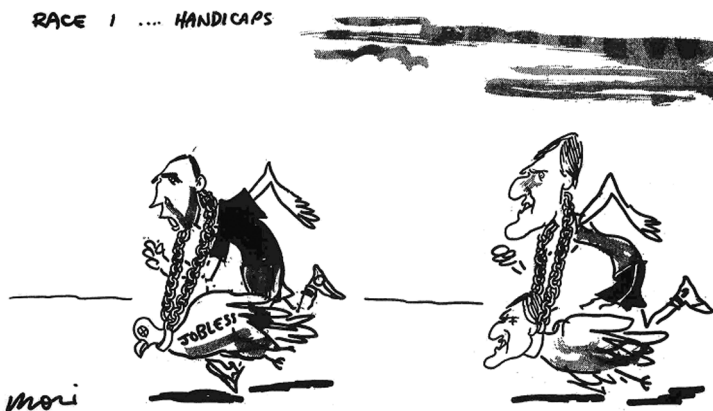


'Andrew Peacock answers the question'
Alan Moir, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 March 1990

have been in serious trouble given the backdrop of exceptionally high interest rates, worrying inflation and a recent crippling airline pilots' strike. The Hawke government was damaged, but for the Coalition parties the problem was there was no 'answer' to the question Moir poses.

1993

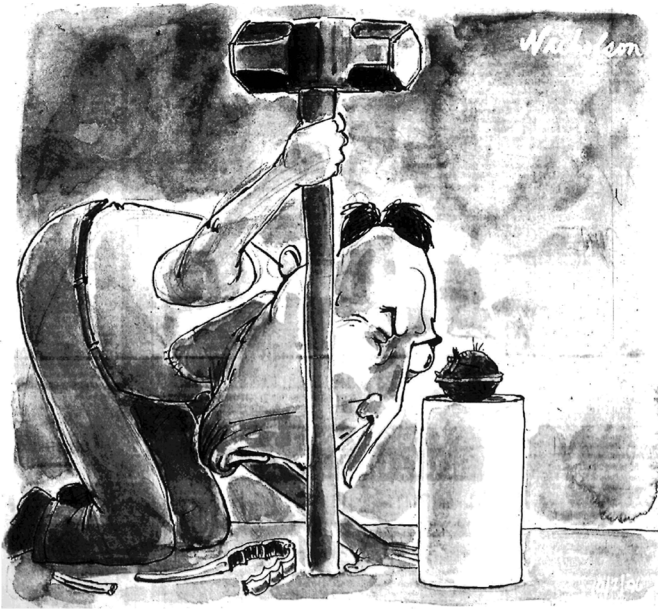
The 1993 election was widely considered unlosable for the Opposition parties given the bitter leadership rivalry between Prime Minister Hawke and Treasurer Paul Keating at a time when the economy was suffering a severe recession. Normally such a combination spells political doom for the incumbent government, and when the unpopular Keating ousted Hawke in a caucus ballot late in 1991 it seemed that Coalition leader John Hewson was set for victory. But with twelve months to paint his rival as a neo-liberal radical the new prime minister managed, as the cartoon below suggests, to depict Hewson as the problem and thereby deflect attention from the unemployment albatross his government carried. The cartoon is particularly prescient, as the election outcome saw Labor re-elected, with a slightly increased majority, largely the result of Keating's outstanding campaigning capacity to demonise Hewson.



'Paul Keating and John Hewson carrying their respective burdens',
Alan Moir, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 February 1993

1996

Throughout the 1996 campaign John Howard made little by way of new policy offerings and claimed Keating was captive of special interest groups. The strategy was clear from the early days of campaigning and Nicholson's cartoon depicting Keating eyeing off a walnut with its give-away John Howard eyebrows is a brilliant cartoon. It manages to capture what many thousands of commentators' words sought to explain, namely that Howard, unlike Peacock and Hewson, was not going to be a 'push over' for Labor. It is also true that the cartoonists did not get a bead on Howard and the nature of the government he proposed.⁵ As Nicholson's image suggests, for them Keating bulked far larger than the challenger, a view that they have now had more than a decade to revise.

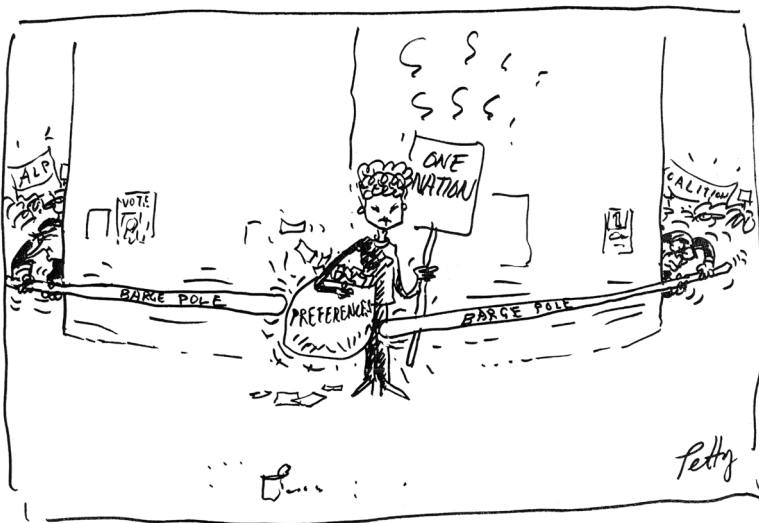


'Keating finds Howard a difficult nut to crack',
Peter Nicholson, *Australian*, 10 February 1996

1998

Two issues featured during the 1998 national election campaign: the government's bold plans to introduce a new tax, the GST, and the

rise of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party. Hanson appealed to latent nationalism and hostility toward Indigenous land rights, Asian immigrants and, more generally, to recent economic reforms. This populism especially resonated among poorer blue-collar communities in the outer suburbs and regional cities. Winning an unprecedented eleven seats and 23 per cent of the first preference vote at the June 1998 Queensland State election, Hanson's party appeared set to shape the outcome of the national election, particularly when it decided to direct preferences against all sitting members. Pundits predicted a ten or so per cent vote for One Nation, largely at the expense of the Coalition parties, and thus the Hanson phenomenon became the subject of many cartoons. Bruce Petty captures well the consternation One Nation caused the major parties. While they wanted to appear to be above such populist politics, in truth there was nothing they would not touch if the need for votes was great enough and the barge pole long enough.

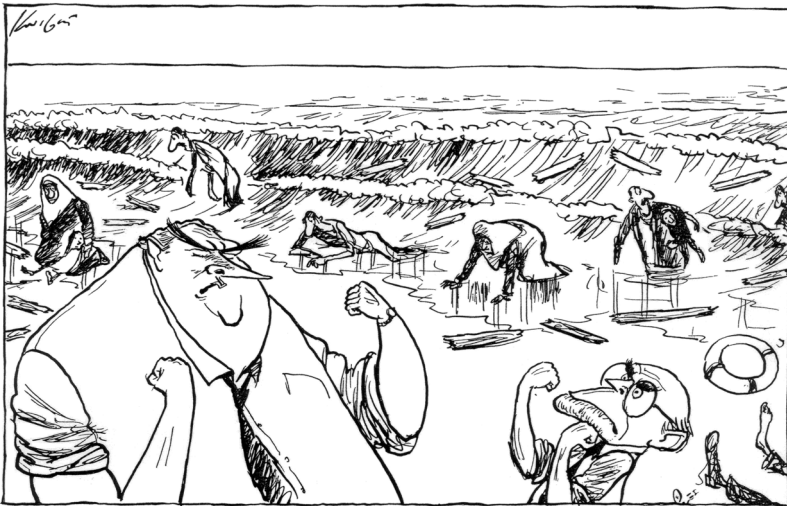


'Hanson and her party's Machiavellian appeal',
Bruce Petty, *Age*, 28 September 1998

2001

The 2001 campaign stands out as one where the cartoonists took a stance against both parties and, for that matter, against the ordinary voters with whom their sympathies usually lie.

The question of refugees occupied centre stage as both leaders tried to appear tough and marching in step with public opinion on border security.⁶ The government's decision to support the US war on terror saw troops dispatched to Afghanistan, and this gave a particular nationalistic dimension to the 2001 campaign. Mark Knight's cartoon, from the middle of the 2001 campaign, presents Howard and Beazley in a dark light as they try to 'better' each other in response to the tragic sinking of a boat carrying refugees to Australian shores. This cartoon is satire at its best—it holds our leaders to moral account, and the reader is not about to laugh loudly but, rather, grimace at the truth it reveals. This cartoon was typical of a host of similar cartoons during the 2001 campaign, which set the cartoonists at odds with the voting public who, in general, supported the tough stance on the 'boat people'.⁷

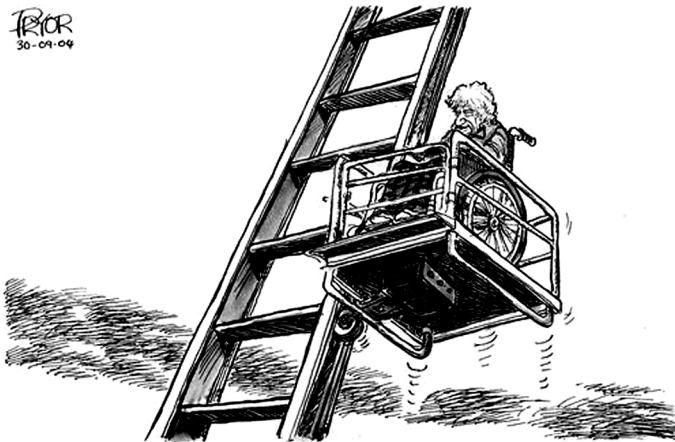


'Beazley and Howard lose their moral compass',
Mark Knight, *Herald Sun*, 24 October 2001

2004

The cartoon by Geoff Pryor, 'Latham's aspirational voter?', which took Mark Latham seriously as a contender against the long-serving Howard, will stand the test of time far better than the bulk of campaign commentary in 2004. A relatively young and

demonstrably inexperienced leader faced a near impossible task of toppling the much more experienced John Howard at a time when the Australian economy was booming and the government was united. Latham sought to use his comparative youth as an advantage over Howard and conjured the metaphor of the 'ladder of opportunity'. 'The ladder' was supposed to sum up his policy approach as one aimed at supporting upwardly mobile blue- and white-collar households' aspirations for home ownership and consumerism. It was supposed to stress how he and Labor were now 'in touch' with the new-millennium working-life experiences of middle Australia. While this poignant metaphor was open to many interpretations, Geoff Pryor's cartoon exposed its essential hollowness and, with it, the sense that Latham's campaign, and Labor's policies, were not convincing enough for voters to countenance a change of government. Latham announced a big-spending promise to offer free healthcare to those aged over sixty-five, and this contradicted the 'ladder's' message of rugged self-improvement. Pryor's satirical look at 'Medicare Gold' depicts a pensioner catching a ride up the ladder of opportunity, the very ladder which was supposed to represent Labor's newly forged commitment to the aspirational voters.



'Latham's aspirational voter?',
Geoff Pryor, *Canberra Times*, 30 September 2004

Part II—Some persistent themes in Australian election cartoons

The following gallery illustrates a number of recurring images, themes and developments in election cartooning in Australia, 1983–2004. While not a synoptic content analysis, which would have to deal with thousands of cartoons and develop an elaborate (and probably rather dull) taxonomy, this account remarks on what you notice as continuities across the different election campaigns. Notable here are the unedifying aspects of the campaign contest, a factor that frequently finds metaphoric expression as a horse race where the ‘nags’ reflect the leaders’ embattled dispositions. Opposition leaders suddenly find themselves the butt of the joke and, at times, an insightful comment emerges on how the wider electorate may be assessing the alternative prime minister. The issues that lie at the heart of any campaign are a feature, and the satirical message of a single cartoon often captures succinctly the flaws in a policy, or exposes the attempt to ‘spin’ the message beyond reasonable belief. Finally, as polling day looms, cartoonists focus on the very act of voting, and here we find comment on voter disenchantment and disengagement with the most vital of democratic acts.

The leaders’ joust

While strong local candidates matter on the ground, election campaigns have become more presidential in the media (and consequently in cartoons) in recent decades. Opposition leaders become equal, at least in theory, with the prime minister during the campaign period and, consequently, they feature along side the PM in many cartoons. Caricature of political leaders is the first task, and joy, for the cartoonist keen to make his or her mark upon their readership. Whether it is Paul Keating drawn as an undertaker, or a favoured caricature of John Howard with his protruding lip and, in the case of Alan Moir, his Cyclops eye, we all come to recognise caricature for the way it speaks to us about our leaders. Even if they adorn their subjects in patrician robes as Larry Pickering did to Gough Whitlam in many a cartoon, cartoonists rarely seek to flatter our political leaders. This is the essence of their licence to mock, to be the modern-day court jesters keen to show the emperor has no clothes.

Invariably, cartoonists portray elections as grand battles with metaphoric reference to sporting contests. Bill Mitchell's cartoon, published during the 1983 campaign's second week, is typical of the sort where cartoonists poke fun at the sudden unedifying gusto with which the leaders attack each other.



'Fraser and Hawke shape up to fight Opposition Leader',
Bill Mitchell, *Australian*, 8 February 1983

Peter Nicholson's disgruntled jockeys, published four days before polling in 2001, draws on the sporting analogy in a more poignant manner. It appears both Howard and Beazley have flogged 'Political cynicism' without gaining any discernible advantage. In 2004, Labor leader Mark Latham joins the PM in a charge to the winner's post on horses named to reflect cartoonist Sean Leahy's assessment of the campaign and, if size is a guide, the likely election result as well.

Cartoonists relish the opportunity to present the prime minister and Opposition leader as liars and conjurers but tend not to follow their British counterparts, where portraying the leaders as buffoons is quite commonplace.⁸ Leaders are less often set up as fools than portrayed as clever manipulators. Les Tanner presents the classic warning regarding the attempt to bribe us, in the 1987 campaign, a theme reprised by Geoff Pryor in 2004, in a cartoon depicting the PM prepared to throw any amount of money at voters in order to win their support.

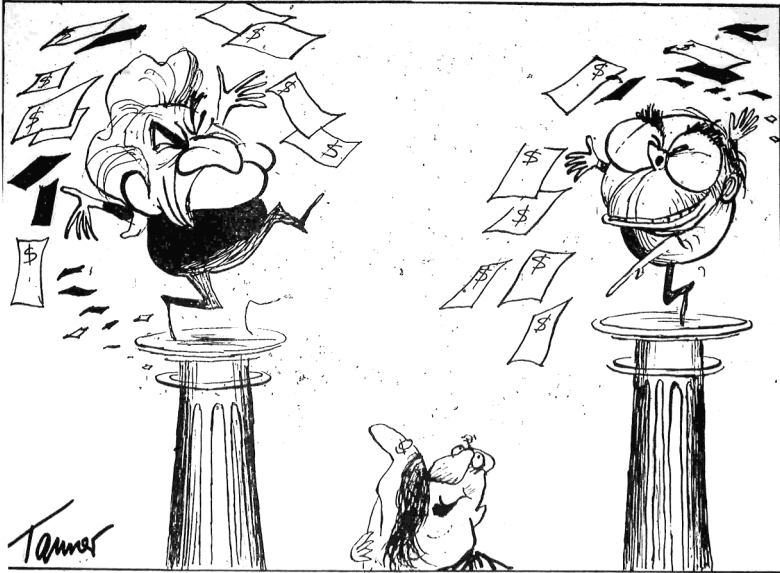
The pressure-cooker atmospherics of election campaigns drive the leaders to great lengths and, along the way, offer unique



'Beazley and Howard riding the same way',
Peter Nicholson, *Australian*, 7 November 2001



'Howard shows Latham the way to win',
Sean Leahy, *Courier-Mail*, 8 October 2004



"What I like about this election is that they're keeping the politics out of it"

'Hawke and Howard hope to bribe voters',
Les Tanner, *Age*, 2 July 1987



'Prime Minister Howard's logical contradiction',
Geoff Pryor, *Canberra Times*, 27 September 2004

opportunities for satirists to exercise their craft and to act as the ‘eye of the storm’. And the focus on leaders is almost exclusive. There are remarkably few election cartoons depicting ministers or their shadows, or even of minor party leaders, from Janine Haines to Bob Brown.

Opposition leaders have no fun

Opposition leaders must view this sudden and temporary parity in cartoons as a mixed blessing, especially if they are not well known to the voters from previous campaigns. Voters generally know what they think of the current prime minister, for good or ill, but suddenly to appear as an equal crook beside the incumbent in cartoons is most likely to encourage a ‘better the devil you know’ attitude in readers. A cartoon can pungently clarify concerns about a relatively unknown Opposition leader, while it can seldom do more than confirm set views about an incumbent prime minister.

Peter Nicholson’s depiction of a defiant and naked Liberal Opposition leader, John Hewson, selling his GST proposal during the 1993 campaign, captures well what was the Coalition Achilles’ Heel, something highlighted by Moir’s cartoon, discussed earlier, that depicts Hewson carrying himself as a handicap. During the 1993 campaign the more Prime Minister Keating revelled in trumping up ‘a scare’ regarding how the GST would change our lives the better became Labor’s chances of holding office.

John Howard was the only long-term Opposition leader successful in defeating an incumbent during the two decades this chapter covers, and as the Nicholson ‘Walnut’ cartoon above suggests, he managed to depict himself as a small target in cartoons as well as in the wider media. Labor Opposition leader Kim Beazley figured on using Howard’s ‘small target’ strategy in the 1998 election and, unlike previous Opposition leaders, he initially received favourable treatment from the cartoonists. For example, Michael Atchison presents Beazley struggling against the odds of the PM’s strategy to use the Commonwealth Games and football finals as a distraction from his controversial new tax agenda. During his early years as leader, Beazley appeared as the kindly, good-hearted large man, but this changed three years later when he tried to compete with Howard by demonstrating his ‘toughness’ on border protection, as illustrated in Knight’s cartoon earlier.

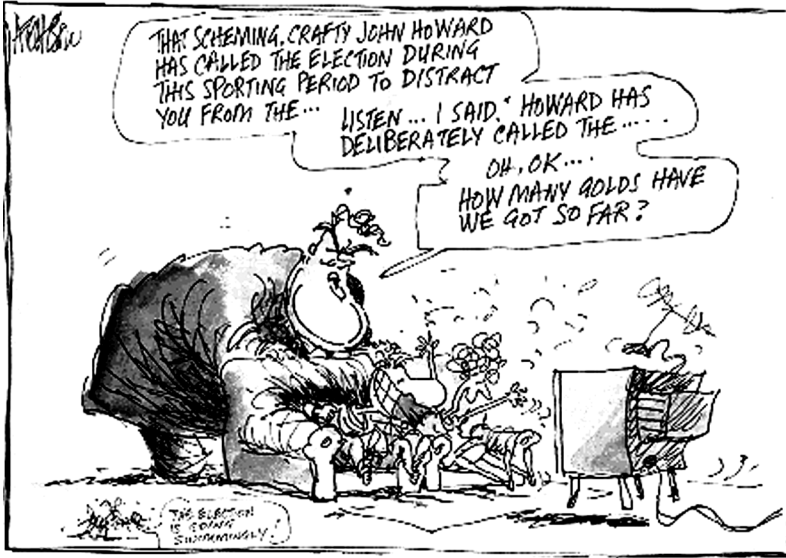


'John Hewson's GST revealed',
Peter Nicholson, *Age*, 9 March 1993

During the 1990 campaign Peacock's personality was constantly questioned, but it was the 2004 election and the arrival of Mark Latham that saw the focus on personality return with considerable force. Cartoonists were drawn to Latham's personality, in particular his reputation as a bully (he'd broken a taxi driver's arm), as foul mouthed (he'd dubbed Howard government ministers a 'conga line of suck holes' for following America into the war in Iraq), and as something of a 'class war' warrior who hated 'old school tie' type privilege. During the early months of 2004 the newly elected Labor leader appeared set to challenge Howard's domination of national politics as he sought to develop policies that might appeal to the so-called 'aspirational voters'.⁹

Issues that shape electoral destiny

Cartoons can catch the momentum of a campaign to depict particular issues and crucial moments with remarkable clarity. This section focuses mainly on the 2004 election, in order to highlight

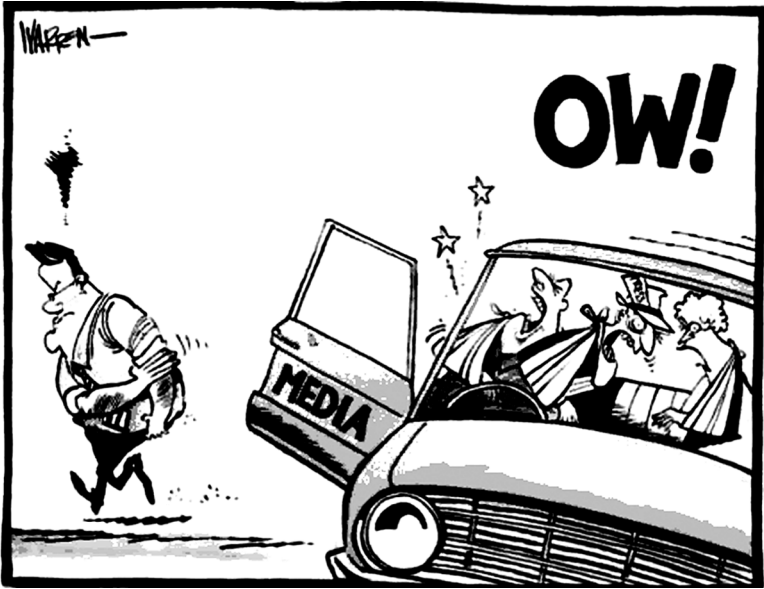


'Beazley struggles to convince voters',
Michael Atchison, *Advertiser*, 16 September 1998

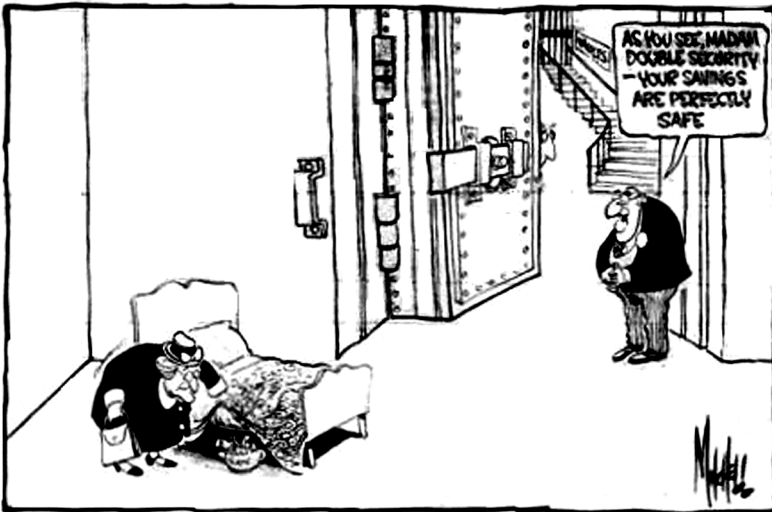
how poignant cartoons may be in capturing the essence of any given day or week of campaigning. But before doing so, consider the cartoon from the 1983 election that shows how desperate leaders may become when the campaign seems to be slipping away. Mitchell recalls the last-ditch attempt by Malcolm Fraser to scare voters with the prospect of their savings not being safe under a Labor government. This led to much comment about Fraser's endeavour to evoke the Menzies era and the notion of 'reds under the bed'.

Trust was the theme the Prime Minister set for his 2004 campaign, and this offered a field day for cartoonists given the incongruity between campaign promises and the public's scepticism toward campaign spin. Sean Leahy cleverly draws our attention to the 'sale' that is about to begin with a cartoon published early in the first week of campaigning. Pointedly, Latham wants to catch the 'trust taxi', while Leahy reminds his readers why Howard and his ministers hardly deserve our trust.

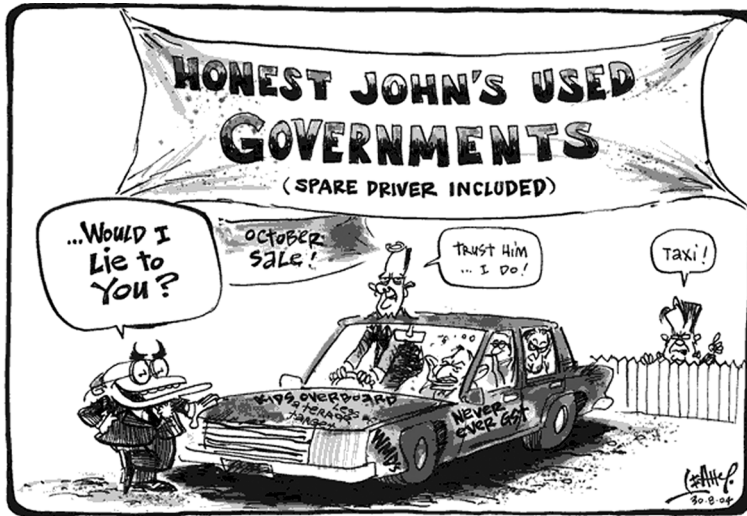
As noted above, Latham was forced on the back foot by Medicare Gold's apparent incongruities, but his campaign suffered a fatal blow when Prime Minister Howard trumped him on the question of restricting logging of Tasmania's old-growth forest. As



'Mark Latham's reputation',
Warren Brown, *Telegraph*, 20 September 2004



'The scare campaign', Bill Mitchell,
Australian, 24 February 1983



'Metaphors to suit Howard and Latham',
Sean Leahy, *Courier-Mail*, 30 August 2004

the last week of campaigning began Latham announced a policy to protect Tasmanian old growth forests, which upset some union leaders. The Prime Minister pounced and, in front of a large meeting of blue-collar Tasmanian workers, announced a far more modest old growth forests protection policy.

Mark Knight captures this well in a very funny cartoon, but it is David Rowe's reflection on the often used metaphor of the political wedge that is perhaps more telling. It depicts the younger Latham out-manoeuvred by the wily Prime Minister, who sets Labor on course for conflict with one of its traditional voting support bases. Latham's campaign strategists figured on winning over the inner urban environmentalist—the so-called green vote which they feared was heading to the Greens. Instead, he was trapped in the political wedge with nowhere to go in the last week of campaigning.

The war on spin and the voter's view

The two decades covered by this survey is a period in which politics has become ever more media-managed. Voters often find this frustrating, and cartoonists are very adept at reflecting this irritation in constant attacks on the ascendancy of spin. Caricature has often aimed to present leaders as clowns trying to fool us, as Bill Leak's



'Howard's newly forged allies',
Mark Knight, *Herald Sun*, 7 October 2004



'Howard wedges Latham', David Rowe,
Australian Financial Review, 8 October 2004

cartoon published at the outset of the 1998 election implies. The leaders know well that their job during the campaign is to avoid, assiduously, any clownishness, and this cartoon suggests that cartoonists are a kind of disloyal opposition to them all.

Does this lead to cynicism, something Michael Hogan argues is a consequence of the unremitting nature of political cartoonists' critique of the political class?¹⁰ Does the prevalence of spin and media management have a particular inflection in Australia where voting is compulsory and preferential, so there is a strong benefit for politicians in being anodyne? Do election cartoons reflect that risk averseness? Arguably this is not a problem, but the empirical data is certainly hard to pin down. The following cartoons reflect some persistent complaints by cartoonists about how politicians treat electors during campaigns.

Compulsory voting has a long tradition of dividing opinion as to its virtues, as Mark Lynch reminds us in his amusing comment on Hawke and Peacock during the 1990 election campaign. Remarkably, Labor was returned to office with a meagre thirty-nine per cent first preference support and Peacock's Liberals managed a mere thirty-five per cent; perhaps Lynch was on to something.

Cartoonists have long expressed sympathy for voters having to cope with campaigns, more recently focusing on their irritation with the opinion pollster. Leahy's cartoon from the 2004 campaign is a good example of the type, and, in this instance, asks which pollster the voter would vote for—the hapless voter's reaction is not something the polling companies would like to believe is the reality.

Another innovation during recent decades, and one of the 'highlights' of contemporary election campaigns, is the televised leaders' debate. Beginning in 1984 these debates always feature in cartoons and, from the outset, cartoonists have concluded their contrived format was something voters were best advised to avoid. While the political commentariat and the campaign managers take them enormously seriously, Mark Lynch's cartoon captures a common sentiment, namely that little is missed by missing the debate.

For the very first occasion in 1984, Bill Mitchell points out that the debate has nothing to do with substance and implies that voters cannot be blamed for being cynical. Interestingly, commentators felt Peacock 'won' the debate, something that sat uneasily in Hawke's craw until he next had an opportunity to debate Peacock in 1990.



'John Howard advises Tim Fischer, Peter Reith, Peter Costello and Alexander Downer', Bill Leak, *Australian*, 9 September 1998



'Hawke and Peacock face voter reality', Mark Lynch, *Australian*, 5 March 1990



'The opinion pollster faces voter reality',
Sean Leahy, *Courier-Mail*, 29 September 2004

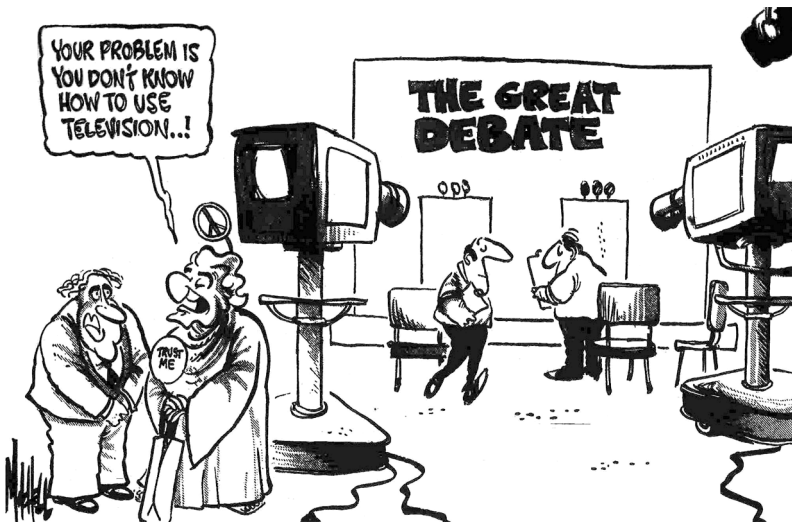


'The leaders' debate is never a winner with voters',
Mark Lynch, *Australian*, 27 February 1990

Nevertheless, the fact that Hawke won in 1984 suggests that the cartoonists might be right in their assertions that debates are a form of pantomime that matter little.

Sprinkled across any election campaign, but tending to become more frequent as polling day approaches, are cartoons depicting voters about to make their decision. Campaign machinations and leaders brawling are removed from the cartoonists' frame and, in their place, we find the 'political outsiders' who will determine who governs. For the most part, cartoonists depict voters as vaguely interested but also often as uncertain of the purpose of their vote. Like the court jesters of old, they question the legitimacy of the powers that be and even make fun of one of democracy's core virtues, the act of voting. George Molnar presents a classic example of the disempowered voter and Les Tanner of the disengaged.

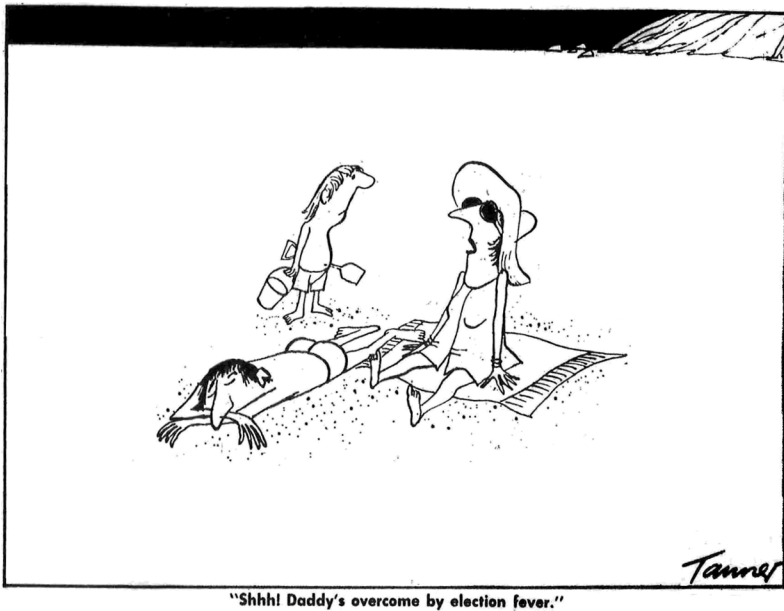
If we are to believe their scepticism is well founded, it follows that democracy is far from perfect and far from respected by voters. This is, of course, debatable, with quantitative survey results showing that while voters are rather jaundiced about politicians and



'Prime Minister Hawke's hubris before the 1984 leaders' debate',
Bill Mitchell, *Australian*, 26 November 1984



'Voter cynicism', George Molnar, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 March 1983



'Voter apathy', Les Tanner, *Age*, 30 November 1984

political parties, they strongly support the general functioning of Australian democracy, which obviously includes the action of casting one's vote.¹¹

If nothing else, this chapter should illustrate one point, namely that looking at a cartoon from a bygone election reminds readers, often amusingly, of key features of the contest. With the pressures and tensions of campaigning presenting national politics in starker light, cartoonists have a smorgasbord of issues, images and characters to choose from. The cartoons presented here illustrate one of the great and persistent luxuries of Australian democracy: the opportunity for voters and even engaged commentators like cartoonists not to have to care too much about voting. We can make fun of the process because it is so stable and, as social surveys indicate, consistently enjoys high levels of public support.¹²