

8. Evatt, Splits and Garters

I had a lot of contact with Herbert Vere Evatt when he was elected Labor Party leader after the death of Ben Chifley in 1951. Evatt was by no means a close friend of Chifley. Among other things, Evatt, when he stood down from the High Court, had attempted to take over Chifley's seat of Macquarie in 1940, but in the end he had to settle for the Sydney seat of Barton, in the south-western suburbs. David Day, in his *Chifley—The biography of J. B. Chifley*, said that Evatt, after appearing unsuccessfully before the High Court to fight off challenges to Chifley's legislation to privatise the banks, said that the legislation was so bad that it was indefensible. A mythology has arisen that Evatt was some sort of bumbling, half-silly figure, probably arising from his premature senility towards the end of his career. Nevertheless, he was an outstanding Australian, possessed of a powerful intellect, an outstanding lawyer, High Court judge, Attorney-General and Minister for External Affairs. As leader of the Australian delegation to the founding meeting of the United Nations, in San Francisco in 1945, he became the champion of small powers. Partly because of Evatt's work, after three months of political struggle, the Charter of the United Nations became a more humane document and larger in scope, containing provisions for the poor, the weak and the oppressed.¹

In 1948, Evatt was elected President of the General Assembly of the United Nations. With his wife, Mary Alice, 'the Doc' was a notable patron of the arts, and gave encouragement to struggling young Australian artists including Russell Drysdale and Sidney Nolan. The Evatts purchased many artists' paintings and drawings and donated them to art galleries and local councils around Australia.² Despite his powerful intellect, Evatt lacked the experience, political cunning and ability to bend to handle the disaster of the Labor split in the 1950s.

Reporting Evatt's speeches in the house was difficult. His years at the Bar and on the Bench had left him with a habit of failing to finish each sentence. Lawyers often get halfway through a sentence to make some point and then (as if in parentheses) mention a precedent they assume the judges will know. (For example, 'My Lords, the defendant does not have to, at this point prove his identity—*Williams v the Crown 1921*'). This approach did not work well in a political speech. It was not a great problem for Hansard because Evatt (or his staff) would make clear what he meant when they corrected the Hansard Green, the transcript of what Hansard had recorded. It is called the Green because of its colour (green in the House, pink in the Senate), and was sent to MPs for correction some half-hour or so after they had finished speaking. They could

¹ The Evatt Foundation, University of Sydney, NSW.

² Ibid.

not, however, change the sense of what Hansard had recorded. For example, if an MP said he knew something of such and such, he could not use the Green to say he knew nothing of such and such. Over the years, there have been some hectic debates about MPs attempting to doctor Hansard in various ways.

Menzies dramatically announced to the house the defection of Vladimir Petrov, an officer of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (or MVD) from the Soviet Embassy on 13 April 1954. Evatt was absent at an old boys' dinner of his school, Fort Street High, in Sydney. This was on the eve of an election and ended any chance of Evatt being elected Prime Minister. The fact Evatt was not informed in advance of Menzies' proposed announcement that night became a major political issue in the weeks that followed. Worse still, Fergan O'Sullivan, then Evatt's press secretary, confessed to the Labor leader five days after the 1954 election that he was the author of a document, 'H', written to inform Russian journalists and agents about the personalities, foibles and political leanings of gallery journalists. In the gallery, we were staggered by this news. O'Sullivan was a popular figure and nobody could have conceived that he could be so naive as to have so endangered his reputation.

Much worse was to come for Evatt. When he debated the Petrov Royal Commission's report in the House of Representatives, Evatt said that he had written to the Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union, Viacheslav Molotov, to ascertain whether certain Russian-language documents in Petrov's possession were genuine or forgeries, and Molotov replied that they were forgeries—'[f]abricated on the instructions of persons interested in the deterioration of the Soviet–Australian relations and discrediting their political opponents'. Evatt declared: 'I attach great importance to this letter.' The members of Caucus could hardly believe this astounding misjudgment by Evatt of relying on the word of the Soviet Foreign Minister. I was in the house that night reporting his speech and, when Evatt made this assertion, the faces of those sitting behind him spoke volumes of the disaster that had overtaken the Opposition and the Labor leader.

In the early hours of 21 November 1954, on the adjournment debate, an extraordinary event occurred in the house. It illustrated the depth of the split in the ALP. Labor MPs from Victoria, who were later to form the Democratic Labor Party (DLP), were still sitting on the opposition benches. The drama involved Victorian Jack Mullens, a fierce anti-communist, a brilliant speaker and Labor veteran, and frontbencher Reg Pollard, a minister in the Curtin and Chifley Governments. On the stroke of midnight, Mullens rose to deliver a withering attack on Australian journalists Wilfred Burchett and Frank Hardy. Hardy was later to write the classic *Power Without Glory*, about the infamous John Wren, who built a fortune on an illegal 'tote' in Melbourne by bribing the police and politicians. The following edited extract from Hansard illustrates the depth of bitterness engendered by the split:

Mr. Mullens (Gellibrand) (12 midnight): At question time today I endeavoured to direct attention to the activities of two Australian 'Haw Haws' who, in my view, are traitors to our people and to the policies that we should uphold. I refer to Wilfred Burchett, who is correspondent in Korea for the Melbourne *Guardian* and ostensibly correspondent for the Paris newspaper *Le Soir*. He exceeds the bounds of liberty in his radio propaganda in which he directs his shafts persistently and tenaciously, but I hope ineffectively, against our Australian boys and our American allies who are fighting in Korea. The second man to whom I refer is the famous, or infamous, Frank J. Hardy, who is now stationed in Moscow. He is a salacious slanderer and smear merchant who is now in an environment that befits him. He is the Moscow correspondent of *The New Times*. I shall give some typical examples of the propaganda that is disseminated by these gentlemen. Burchett has written in a despatch from Korea—'If the people of the world strongly enough demand it, U.S. war-mongers can be forced to agree to an armistice...The war-mongers' dream of an easy victory in Korea have [sic] been finally shattered.'

Hardy contributed the following passage to *The New Times*:

'Before the beginning of this century, our people were fighting the dead hand of British Imperialism. Just when victory seemed to be within their grasp along came decadent, bloodthirsty American Imperialism.'

And later, Mullens said:

I am amazed at the colossal unawareness of the Government and its almost complete indifference to the propaganda which, while it is not always as obvious as is that which is disseminated by these buccaneers, is nevertheless, tenacious and designed subtly to condition the Australian community to a breaking of its morale in order to pave the way for the entry of these self-styled commissars. It is time that the Government did something about such propaganda. There is a tone abroad in this community that is derogatory to our ally, the United States of America. It emanates from the likes of these leeches upon the body politic who were most anxious that American boys should defend Australia. Now, the smear campaign is called for. In their eyes, every beauty lies in Russian imperialism and the United States of America is the home of warmongers. By implication, Australians, too, are warmongers. Today, these gentlemen are pro-Russian, pro-Egyptian, pro-Persian and pro-everything but pro-Australian. It is the duty of an enlightened government to do something about this matter. We have our own destiny to forge. I declare emphatically that I stand for the God of my fathers and the destiny of my children. Come rack or ruin, I shall never bend

my head to any storm of this nature. I invite the Government to say unequivocally whether it intends to keep these traitors out of Australia; and, if not, whether it intends to deal with them effectively when they return to this country. No specious plea of liberty on the part of the Government will satisfy me in this matter. It is the bounden duty of the Australian community to defend itself if not in our own interests, at least in the interests of generations to come. I do not hesitate to make this plea as a good Labor man.

Mr. Pollard (Lalor) (12.26 a.m.): I do not claim to be as good as, or a better Laborite than, the honorable member for Footscray.

Mr. Speaker: Order! There is no member for such an electorate in this House.

Mr. Pollard: I meant the honorable member for Gellibrand Mr. Mullens. I take this opportunity to dissociate myself from what appears to have been a request to the Government and to this Parliament—

Mr. Mullens: The honorable member is defending the 'Coms'.

Mr. Pollard: I am not.

Mr. Speaker: Order! I ask the honorable member for Lalor to address me.

Mr. Mullens: They are two 'Coms', and the honorable member defends them.

Mr. Pollard: Obviously the honorable member for Gellibrand is just as competent at making false accusations—

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. Pollard: Against a member of this Parliament, in the House, as he is to take advantage of parliamentary privilege to attack men who are outside it.

Mr. Mullens: Oh, get out! They are a couple of 'Coms', and the honorable member is defending them.

Mr. Pollard: I am defending the right of free speech.

Mr. Mullens: Free speech for Hardy!

Mr. Speaker: Order! I ask the honorable member for Gellibrand to refrain from interjecting.

Mr. Pollard: I am defending what the great Churchill and the great Roosevelt were prepared to advocate. They stood for the Four Freedoms, and the Allies fought for those Four Freedoms, which were: Freedom from fear, freedom from want, freedom of speech, and freedom of worship. I do not want to do the honorable member for Gellibrand an injustice, but it appears to me that he asked the Government to take some action to prevent two men, who are now in foreign lands, from continuing to write and express their opinions about the international situation.

Mr. Mullens: That is plain rubbish, and the honorable member knows it.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. Pollard: The honorable member for Gellibrand wants to keep out of the country two Australians, and because I say that they should be allowed to re-enter this country and tell the people about what they say, and what they think—

Mr. Speaker: Order! Will the honorable member face the chair, and address me. [Pollard had his back to the Speaker, directly facing and berating Mullens.]

Mr. Pollard: The honorable member for Gellibrand and I, if he is so disposed, could meet those two men in public debate, and deal with their arguments. After all the British Empire was built up on the struggle for the right of men to express their opinions, however unpalatable those opinions were. For the honorable member for Gellibrand to say that I am defending Communists, as such, is a perversion of the truth, and an unfair attack upon me, and I brand him for what he is—a narrow-minded skunk.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. Mullens leaving his seat, and advancing towards the table.

This brief Hansard reference hardly caught the drama I saw from my seat in the press gallery. Mullens was on his feet trying to climb over the desks in front of him, in an obvious attempt to join in physical combat with Pollard on the floor of the Parliament. Sitting alongside Mullens, Pat Galvin, an SA backbencher, tried to restrain him but got a Mullens' elbow in his ribs for his trouble. Finally, Mullens was restrained from getting to Pollard. The Speaker, Archie Cameron, made no serious attempt to warn Mullens and prevent the scene of two Labor men at one another's throats, but simply let the Labor Party tear itself apart on the floor of the house. Hansard takes up the action:

Mr. Pollard: [still with his back to the Speaker, addressing Mullens as he attempted to climb over the desks in front of him] He is a man who is prepared to do violence.

Mr. Speaker: Order! The honorable member for Gellibrand will resume his seat.

Mr. Mullens: Is not the honorable member for Lalor required to withdraw his remark that I am a narrow-minded skunk?

Mr. Speaker: That remark was entirely unparliamentary, and I ask the honorable member for Lalor to withdraw it.

Mr. Pollard: I withdraw the words to which objection has been taken, but I expect the honorable member for Gellibrand to withdraw the statement that I have defended the Communists.

Mr. Speaker: I think that those words also should be withdrawn. Any quarrels may be settled outside the chamber.

Mr. Pollard: The honorable member for Gellibrand has not withdrawn the words to which I have objected.

Mr. Speaker: Order! I ask the honorable member to withdraw the statement to which exception has been taken.

Mr. Pollard: I have withdrawn the words that I addressed to the honorable member for Gellibrand.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, and I request the honorable member for Gellibrand to do likewise.

Mr. Mullens: What is the statement that I am asked to withdraw?

Mr. Speaker: The statement that the honorable member for Lalor was a defender of the Communists.

Mr. Mullens: I accept his statement that he is not a defender of the Communists, and I withdraw the words to which objection has been taken.

Mr. Speaker: Very well. The incident is closed inside the chamber.

Pollard wound up his speech and Eric Harrison wound up the adjournment debate with standard assurances that matters raised in the adjournment debate would be referred to the responsible minister. Finally, the Speaker, Archie Cameron, had his say on the extraordinary event that he had presided over:

Mr. Speaker, in view of what has just occurred, I direct the attention of honourable members to Standing Order 80, which reads as follows—

‘The House will interfere to prevent the prosecution of a quarrel between Members arising out of debates or proceedings of the House or of any committee thereof. If any attempt is made to prosecute quarrel within the four walls of this building, I had asked the House to enforce the standing order. What honorable members do outside the building is their own affair.’

This seemed a clear enough suggestion from the Speaker that Mullens and Pollard slug it out in the parliamentary rose garden. In 1955, the split became official at the federal conference of the ALP in Hobart. A number of Victorian State Labor MPs left the ALP, as did seven federal Victorian MPs: Mullen, Keon, Bryson, Joshua, Cremean, Andrews and Bourke. They formed the DLP in April 1956 and none was re-elected. But eventually they had the balance of power in the Senate, with the DLP represented by former Queensland Labor Premier Vince Gair, Frank McManus (Vic.) and George Cole (Tas.). By directing their preferences to the Government, the DLP undoubtedly played a key role in Menzies’ success at elections from then on. It was not until the Whitlam Government came to power that the DLP was finally ousted from the Senate.

The ‘Movement’—or to give it its full title, the Catholic Social Studies Movement—was the brainchild of B. A. Santamaria and could trace its origins back to 1939. The Movement was a secretive organisation dedicated to defeating communist influence in the unions. So powerful was the Movement that it eventually gained control of the Victorian Labor Party. Evatt denounced the Movement, and Labor became embroiled in an all-consuming internal struggle, eventually leading to the formation of the DLP.

As well as the issue of the influence of communists within the Labor Party and the unions, the split had deep sectarian roots. This did not mean that all Catholic MPs in the ALP were to join the DLP, nor were all DLP MPs Catholics, but the dispute was sectarian based to a large degree. The split even damaged friendships in the press gallery. Kevin Power, the head of bureau for the Sydney *Daily Mirror*, was a Catholic and an overt supporter of the DLP side of politics. His friend Ian Fitchett was not, and I recall one stormy scene in the gallery when Fitchett said to Power: ‘You’re a fucking Grouper, Power.’ There was no denial from Power and his angry reply was, ‘Shut up, Fitchett.’

Like other pubs in Canberra, the Kingston Hotel in Canberra Avenue was home to a number of journalists and was well known to me. Directly opposite the ‘Kingo’ was the Soviet Embassy—a few hundred metres east of Manuka. From a first-floor window in the pub, Australian Security Intelligence Organisation

(ASIO) agents kept a watchful eye on who came and went through the embassy's front gate. The Kingo was the venue for one of the most important conferences ever held in Canberra: the 22 March 1963 Special Federal Conference of the ALP. There were 36 delegates, six from each State—a form of federalism similarly embodied in the Australian Senate, which has an equal number of senators from each State. The conference was asked to consider whether the federal parliamentary Labor Party should support Menzies' legislation authorising the construction by the United States of a naval communications station on North-West Cape in Western Australia.

The External Affairs Minister, Garfield Barwick, described it as 'a wireless station, nothing more nor less'. This was a cover-up. A wireless station, indeed! It was far more important than was portrayed by the Government. Together with other stations around the world, North-West Cape was a vital part of the US nuclear weapons program. These stations had the capacity to communicate with US Polaris nuclear-powered submarines capable of launching a nuclear missile strike against any target in the world and were at the very tip of US capability to deter nuclear attacks. The station at North-West Cape thus helped keep the Cold War cold, not hot. Within the Labor Party, it raised a question of national sovereignty over Australian soil.

At the Kingston Hotel, the delegates debated the base legislation after Calwell had addressed it and then withdrew. Under ALP rules, the leader and deputy leader were not delegates and did not have a vote, yet they were required to carry out the decision of the conference. The conference was still debating well into the night and Calwell, impatient and accompanied by Whitlam and Freudenberg, left Parliament House to go to the hotel and join journalists waiting for an outcome. As Freudenberg recalls, on the stroke of midnight, the vote was taken narrowly accepting Menzies' legislation, conditional on the base being jointly controlled and Australian sovereignty guaranteed.

The Daily Telegraph published a bombshell picture of Calwell and Whitlam waiting in the dead of night outside the hotel for the vote. Menzies leapt on this to point out that Liberal MPs were not directed by anyone as to how they should vote. Labor MPs on the other hand were instructed by '36 faceless men'—a devastating term he coined. They were not to know it then, but Menzies, *The Daily Telegraph* and the 36 faceless men were to change the face of politics and lead to the election of the Whitlam Government. This humiliation strengthened Whitlam's determination to end the absurdity of the Labor machine's unelected apparatchiks instructing the parliamentary wing how to vote in Parliament. He succeeded magnificently.

Another brutal exercise of power by ALP officials followed, when the Treasurer, Jack Renshaw, brought down the annual budget for the NSW Labor Government,

which had been in power for 23 years. It provided special grants to Catholic and other non-government schools for building science laboratories. Arthur Calwell had assured the Premier, Bob Heffron, that this did not contravene ALP policy. Calwell had not reckoned on intervention by the WA ALP Secretary, Joe Chamberlain. Chamberlain was deeply antagonistic to the Catholic Church and the role of its bishops in the Labor split. The Federal Executive met in Adelaide in October and Chamberlain put forward a successful resolution ordering the NSW Government's grants for science laboratories to be cancelled. Cyril Wyndham, the first full-time ALP National Secretary, was sent to Sydney to ensure the instruction was followed. A week later, Menzies announced the 30 November election—a year early. He had seen his opportunity on state aid and a feature of his campaign was to promise almost exactly the proposal Renshaw had vainly put up.

Shortly before the 1963 election, the Queen made Menzies a Knight of the Order of the Thistle, a Scottish honour entirely within her gift to award. In the gallery at the time, there was much discussion that this would have disappointed Ming. He would have been ambitious for the supreme honour: the Order of the Garter, founded in 1344 by Edward III—also solely within the gift of the Queen. Winston Churchill, who resisted any honour throughout most of his long political career, finally consented to take a Garter knighthood. In the house, replying to Menzies' announcement of the early election, Calwell showed his scholarship and flair for off-the-cuff remarks:

My distinguished friend, the Prime Minister, is now, one might say, a Scottish nobleman. He is a member of the most distinguished, the most ancient and most noble Order of the Thistle. If I, as an ordinary Australian bloke, may address my noble Scottish friends, I would say to him in the words of Macbeth:

Lay on, Macduff,

And damn'd be him that first cries, 'hold, enough'.

Calwell was later to be made a Knight of the Order of St Gregory the Great by Pope Paul VI. Freudenberg recalls a brilliant cartoon by Rigby of Calwell in full armour, lance at the ready, charging into the house, declaring to a cowering Menzies, 'Have at thee, Sir Thistle! Equal terms at last.'

US President John Kennedy was assassinated on 23 November 1963, one week out from the election at which Labor suffered a heavy defeat. The assumption, which I share, is that voters were alarmed by the Kennedy assassination in the Dallas motorcade, seeing it as a signal of the heating up of the Cold War. Many

decided it was no time to risk a Labor government. Although he might not have won, Calwell would have made a much closer race of it but for the Kennedy shock.

Freudenberg resigned as Calwell's press secretary/speechwriter following another Chamberlain attack on state aid. Freudenberg had been press secretary/speechwriter to Calwell since July 1961, and had come to believe—despite his personal regard for the old stager—that Calwell was standing in the way of success for the Labor Party by his determination to hang on to the leadership. Freudenberg was right, and this was the general view of the gallery and a majority of rank-and-file ALP members.

Calwell's two great personal tragedies were the death of his only son, at eleven years of age—a victim of leukaemia. Calwell wore a black tie every day of his life from that point on. The other tragedy was the rupture of his relations with the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, Daniel Mannix. Calwell's wife, Elizabeth, was a staunch supporter of Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). Freudenberg remembers that at lunches he attended with Calwell and his wife, Elizabeth would rail against Bob Santamaria and the Catholic establishment. Shunned at their parish church in North Melbourne, the Calwells sought refuge in the Christian charity of the St Francis Church in the city.

Elizabeth was particularly bitter following her sacking as social writer for the Melbourne Catholic paper, the *Catholic Advocate*. She blamed the Melbourne Catholic establishment for this, believing it to be an act of spite against her husband.³ In *A Figure of Speech*, Freudenberg (not a Catholic) tells how he broke with Calwell after the then Opposition Leader had received a powerful letter from Bishop James Carroll, Auxiliary to Cardinal Gilroy. Carroll came from a staunch Labor family and played an important role in resisting Bob Santamaria's National Civic Council penetrating New South Wales. Carroll's letter complained that despite traditional Catholic support for Labor, the ALP turned its face against any form of assistance for private schools.

Although shut out of the Melbourne Catholic establishment, Calwell held to his belief in state aid for Catholic schools, as did his deputy, Whitlam, who saw the writing on the wall in the 1963 election campaign when Menzies offered aid to private schools. Calwell was so impressed by the Carroll letter that he proposed to have it typed up and presented to the 8 February 1966 meeting of the ALP Federal Executive. Events at the Federal Executive changed his mind. Joe Chamberlain believed state aid breached Section 116 of the Constitution: 'The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion...'

3 Conversation with Freudenberg.

He decided on an all-out attack on state aid. Before Calwell could produce the Carroll letter at the Federal Executive, Chamberlain successfully moved for the party to challenge in the High Court the state aid given by the States and the aid to science laboratories legislation of the Menzies Government. The ALP's legal and constitutional committee was instructed to draw up the appeal. As the leading member of this committee, Whitlam furiously attacked the Chamberlain motion as reckless, vindictive and electoral suicidal. He warned that if the resolution was adopted he would not serve on the committee—a promise he kept after the resolution was adopted. Calwell was silent throughout the drama, but inwardly delighted his challenger, Whitlam, was getting himself into a mess.

The Carroll letter did not surface. Freudenberg, after the meeting, asked Calwell what had happened to the letter and received the reply: 'The opportunity didn't arise.' Calwell asked Freudenberg to prepare a radio broadcast script for 3KZ, a Labor station in Melbourne, justifying the Federal Executive's action. He refused and Calwell gave the job to extreme left-winger Bill Hartley, a protégé of Chamberlain's and Secretary of the Victorian ALP. When Freudenberg realised the Hartley radio script directly attacked Whitlam, he resigned. His letter of resignation stated he could 'no longer give him [Calwell] the loyalty to which the leader of the Labor Party is entitled'.

Calwell was one of the most complex and interesting personalities in the Parliament. Above all an Australian nationalist, he was fervent in his opposition to the tradition of British governors-general occupying Yarralumla. Nor was he a monarchist. At a time of speculation about who Menzies would have as the next Governor-General, he appointed the Hon. William Philip (Viscount De L'Isle), the last British representative to occupy the office. Philip bumped into Calwell in King's Hall and asked him who he thought might get the next job. He remarked: 'There is only one Governor-General better than an Australian and that is a member of the royal family. They know how to do the job.' And this was long before Kerr's outrageous sacking of Whitlam.

Calwell was right. Whitlam retained the confidence of the Lower House, yet he was sacked. No member of the royal family, in these circumstances, would ignore the advice of the Prime Minister. Whitlam was immediately on the attack against Hartley, declaring to the media, 'this extremist group [controlling the Federal Executive] has deliberately humiliated the parliamentary party...it will and must be repudiated.' In a TV interview, he commented on the state aid decision: 'I can only say we've just got rid of the 36 faceless men stigma to be faced with the 12 witless men' (the Federal Executive).

The Federal Executive met hastily to deal with the Whitlam challenge. Chamberlain failed to have Whitlam expelled from the party due to an extraordinary stroke of luck for the deputy Labor leader. Rex Patterson, a

former deputy director of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, in 1966 won the Queensland federal seat of Dawson in a by-election. He visited Canberra to thank those members of the ALP who had assisted him in his campaign. He was visiting Allan Fraser, the member for Eden-Monaro (NSW), when Fraser took a call from Calwell. An excited Calwell exclaimed, 'We have got the big bastard [Whitlam], he will be gone by lunchtime.' Overhearing this, Patterson immediately alerted Whitlam's office and contact was made with Jack Egerton, State ALP President. Egerton urgently telephoned the two Queensland delegates to say, 'If you vote to expel Gough Whitlam, I'll have your balls'. That was the beginning of the end for Calwell. (Egerton was later in disgrace with the ALP and lost all his positions when, in defiance of his party's platform, he accepted a knighthood from the corrupt Queensland Nationals Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen. Egerton was brought down by his arrogance.)

Following his resignation, Freudenberg went back to his bolthole of Melbourne's *The Sun News Pictorial*, and when Whitlam attained the leadership, became his press secretary. They had for years had an unspoken understanding that Freudenberg would join Whitlam when he became leader.

Ministers cultivate gallery journalists, and some, such as Peter Howson, were assiduous in working on journalistic contacts. Howson, like Gorton, was a fighter pilot, and, when flying a Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm Albacore over Malta, in company with four Hurricanes, he took on some 70 German planes. Howson was shot down and had a deep and long scar on his face to show for it.⁴

Howson was Liberal MP for the Melbourne seats of Fawkner and later Casey. Slight and handsome, with a clipped English accent, he was an old-school conservative, a friend of Harold Holt, but an enemy in Victorian politics of John Gorton. Howson's diary (*The Life of Politics*) is one of the most informative and interesting books on Australian postwar politics ever published, recording his various attempts to widen his contacts with gallery journalists. Yet his tactics initially were puzzling. He records (19 September 1963): 'I had to get the Serjeant-at-Arms to carpet (Ian) Fitchett (*Sydney Morning Herald*) for entering our party room. We will get a blast from him in his weekly article next Tuesday. But it will be a salutary lesson for the press gallery.'

Just what offence Fitchett had committed is unclear. He certainly would not have attempted to enter the party room during its regular weekly meeting. Although journalists had to pass the doors of both the Coalition and the Labor party rooms in the government and opposition lobbies, they were not permitted to even 'linger' in the corridors while a party room meeting was in progress. At other times, journalists often were in the party room to see if an MP they wished

4 Reid, Alan 1971, *The Gorton Experiment*, Shakespeare Head Press, Sydney, p. 35.

to interview was inside. During Premiers' Conferences, gallery members were welcome in the government party room—a venue for government-provided drinks. At that time, Howson held the junior position of Deputy Government Whip. He was either brave or foolhardy in taking on Fitchett, although it was unlikely the Serjeant-at-Arms would have revealed to Fitchett who had doxed him in.

The late George Kerr, when he was political correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, told the author of a colourful incident involving a leak from the government party room. Treasurer, Arthur Fadden, was to brief the government party room during the dinner adjournment on the legislation he would introduce that night to make major changes to the banking system, including splitting the Reserve Bank away from the government-owned Commonwealth Bank. This had been the subject of controversy in the party room, with some of the younger backbench Liberals pressing Fadden to go further than he proposed by putting the private banks on the same footing as the Commonwealth Bank. Fitchett, then political correspondent for *The Age*, and Kerr were keen to get any snippet from the party room on the Fadden briefing.

They arranged that Kerr would patrol the bottom government lobby, one floor down from the party room, and collar anyone he could after the meeting broke up. Fitchett positioned himself in King's Hall, which was crowded with members of the public waiting to get into the public galleries for the resumption of the sittings in the house at 8 pm. Kerr got very little from those MPs he intercepted and hurried to King's Hall to confer with Fitchett. Just as he arrived, he saw Bill Wentworth hurrying away from Fitchett. At this point, Fitchett, both hands cupped around his mouth to form a megaphone, roared at the retreating Wentworth: 'Wentworth, you're a coward and a c**t.' Obviously, the Member for Mackellar had given nothing away. The next day, Fitchett was seated in the tiny *Age* office on a commodious old leather lounge chair, when Wentworth sheepishly appeared at the door to mend his fences with *The Age* correspondent. 'Fuck off, Wentworth,' barked Fitchett. From that point on, Wentworth was Fitchett's best party-room leaker.

Every bureau head had his leaker—from both the government and the opposition party rooms. Menzies was angered by such leaks because they could be seen as a demonstration that he was not completely in charge and many of the leaks amounted to criticisms of him and his government. Labor leaders, and particularly Evatt, were angered and often wounded by leaks. During the Labor split of the 1950s, the gallery was focused far more on the Labor Caucus than on the Coalition party room. During one tumultuous Caucus meeting, the Groupers (later to form the DLP) criticised Evatt, prompting the Labor leader to leap onto a table, shouting to the Labor Whip, Fred Daly: 'Take their names, Daly.'

Allan Fraser, the Labor member for the NSW federal seat of Eden-Monaro, was Kevin Power's prized Caucus leak. Before entering Parliament, Fraser was the political correspondent for the *Mirror*. Soon after each Caucus meeting, the phone would ring in Power's small office. Sometimes, when neither Power nor Les Love was in the office, I would take the call. A familiar voice would say: 'Have you a pencil?' Then he would dictate a complete story, starting something along the lines: 'Canberra Tuesday, Federal Labor Caucus was in uproar today when Opposition Leader, H. V. Evatt, attacked members of the Catholic Group movement and threatened to have them expelled stop quote I will not put up with this disloyalty unquote Evatt said stop.' And Fraser would go on to dictate a complete story, needing no rewriting and suitable for immediate submission to the *Mirror*.

Important party-room leaks in the Menzies era were less frequent, mainly because government activity was, by today's standards, subdued and the level of legislation much lower. Very occasionally Evatt, and later Calwell, would stand in the opposition lobby and give a hasty briefing of Caucus meetings to journalists. As Opposition Leader, Whitlam would often hold a briefing in his office to give journalists details. Later, the present system of briefings was formalised by both parties, with MPs, not senior figures, from each party room appointed to brief journalists. They are not to be quoted directly and they play down any party-room trouble. Nevertheless, these briefings provide a good basis for journalists to then seek out from their own contacts just what happened. Those appointed to do the briefings are often on the way up the slippery pole of politics.

Whether Labor is in or out of power, Caucus (the parliamentary Labor Party) is of greater interest to the media than the Liberal (or Coalition) party room. Caucus is all-powerful; the Liberal party room is powerless. All three of the major parties—the ALP, the Liberals and the Nationals—are, like Australia, based on a federation. There are autonomous State divisions, or branches, affiliated with the national ALP. The National Conference—the supreme policymaking body—is responsible for the party's platform. The National Executive, with the National Secretary as the chief administrative officer, administers the party. The role of Caucus is to implement the platform of the party, and it is free to set its own timetable for achieving this.

A Labor government cannot defy the platform, hence the National Conference was called to allow Labor to support Menzies' legislation to establish a US naval communications base at North-West Cape, even though the platform declared the whole of the southern hemisphere should be nuclear free. The conference also was required to approve the sale of the government-owned assets of the Commonwealth Bank and Qantas. Caucus elects the leader and deputy leader of the party and leader and deputy leader in the Senate and all ministers or

shadow ministers. The capacity to make these appointments extends right down to which Labor MPs will get a perk trip abroad on a parliamentary delegation. Kevin Rudd, having won the 2007 election, asserted he alone would appoint the members of the Labor ministry, meaning Caucus nominally gave up its power to elect ministers.

Oddly enough though, the ministry Rudd selected accorded exactly with the list the factional Labor chiefs had agreed to. Peter Hartcher's book on the downfall of Howard, *To the Bitter End*, confirms that Rudd did not select the ministry alone. He writes that on the weekend of the Labor election victory in 2007, Rudd and Julia Gillard (of Martin Ferguson's Left faction) crafted a 30-member ministry, 16 from the Left, 12 from the Right, one from the Centre and one unaligned. The Right was under-represented by two and Right powerbroker Robert Ray kicked up a fuss, warning Rudd that what he was doing was akin to fighting a war on the western and eastern fronts at the same time. When the ministry 'selected' by Rudd was announced, Ray had got his way, with the Left losing two and the Right gaining two.

Menzies, in forming the Liberal Party, ensured that the parliamentary leader would have total control. Rank-and-file Liberal Party members could discuss policy at their various State and federal meetings, but this policy could not be imposed on the parliamentary Liberal Party. The only real power of the Liberal party room is to elect its leader and deputy, or to dump them. The Liberal party room may not direct the Cabinet, or reject a Cabinet decision. The Liberal leader decides who will be ministers and what portfolios they will hold.

The selection of Country Party (later National Party) ministers and their portfolios, if the two non-Labor parties are in coalition, is a different matter. National Party portfolios are negotiated between the two party leaders. The basis of the proportion of Liberal ministers against Nationals ministers depends on the share of House of Representatives seats each party holds after an election. The Nationals party room elects its share of ministers or shadow ministers. The Nationals leader is free to choose his portfolio and is additionally Deputy Prime Minister/Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Menzies believed that, as backbenchers had no power in the legislative process, they had a perfect right to cross the floor and vote against the Government. (Crossing the floor against the Liberal leader is not, however, a good career move.) Liberal and Nationals ministers are bound to support Cabinet decisions, even though they might have disagreed with a decision in Cabinet. This rule did not apply to Labor, and efforts by Whitlam as Prime Minister to change the situation were resisted. Finally, Bob Hawke succeeded in adopting the principle whereby members of the ministry should always support decisions of Cabinet (but he allowed Stewart West to disagree).

The ambitious Peter Howson in his diaries⁵ revealed his anxiety for promotion above his then position as Minister for Air: 'I must still try to get closer to some of the Liberal backbenchers. And I don't think I am much closer to the press gallery.' Closer or not to the press gallery, he displayed no knowledge of how it operated with his entry for 15 May 1967:

Later in the evening I got John Bennetts of *The Age*—also chairman of the press gallery—to come down to see if I could manage to keep the press gallery quiet on the move of the Mirage squadron from Williamstown (near Newcastle) to Butterworth in Malaya. Unfortunately there were reports of their movements on the ABC tonight. Luckily all has gone well, after the first announcement we've heard nothing more and it looks as if we can keep the news quiet until the Mirages get to Butterworth later on this week.

Bennetts was not the chairman of the press gallery, he was the President. Further, Bennetts would not dream of going around the gallery telling journalists not to write about anything. If he had been so foolish, it would have guaranteed that every bureau would have reported the story Howson wanted to be kept quiet. It is surprising that Howson failed to understand that the gallery is not like a cabinet or a government department, a company or a troop of boy scouts.

Each bureau is answerable only to the media organisation it represents. The misconception persists even today with commentators (not in the press gallery) referring to the 'gallery rat pack' and suggesting they are led by one or other senior gallery journalist to take a particular line on some political development. It is true that when a big story breaks every bureau is after the story. Often they adopt the same slant or pin the blame or credit on the same politician. This is mostly the case when it is obvious which politician should bear the blame or receive the praise. There is no rat pack.

For some years there was an informal grouping of bureaus in the gallery, known as 'the Club', which in effect syndicated stories. Yet this was not a 'gallery rat pack' in the sense critics mean of attributing an unfair collective decision by the gallery as a whole to pursue some objective. The Club operated in the 1950s and 1960s and finally withered away with the arrival of new gallery members with a competitive spirit who spurned it. The Club flourished in the 1950s and mainly involved the swapping of carbon copies of news stories among papers at first confined to the Melbourne Herald group: Brisbane's *Courier-Mail*, the *Herald*, *The Sun News Pictorial* (both Melbourne) and *The Advertiser* (Adelaide). At

⁵ Howson, Peter 1984, *The Howson Diaries. The life of politics*, Don Aitkin (ed.), Viking Press, Ringwood, Vic.

various times, outsiders were also included in the 'Club': the Sydney papers the *Daily Mirror*, the *Sun*, *The Daily Telegraph* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*; plus *The Telegraph* (Brisbane) and *The News* (Adelaide).

Clem Lloyd⁶ points out that on occasions when a paper was outside the Club, its bureau head, such as Alan Reid (the Sydney *Sun* and later *The Daily Telegraph*) and Ian Fitchett (*The Age*), could break stories that the much wider resources of the Club had failed to get. When Fitchett (who despised the Club) moved from *The Age* to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, he inherited Club membership. With the agreement of his editor, John Pringle, Fitchett terminated association with the Club. Lloyd observed:

In many ways the 'Club' enshrined mediocrity. The fruits of the most skilled were delivered to the less efficient; in return, the better journalists had their flanks guarded and could rely on a cover for routine news. An area of political journalism which required individual skills and not the copy of others, I was to soon appreciate, was being on the road with political leaders in an election campaign.

⁶ Lloyd, *Parliament and the Press*.