



Rudd's ruthless style entrenched Labor

The Opposition Leader has no ministerial history, so we must look to his past to predict how he might behave as prime minister, argues Scott Prasser

WHEN John Howard became Prime Minister in 1996, he had held three ministerial posts, including treasurer, and served in different Opposition shadow portfolios in addition to two stints as Opposition leader. His policy interests were broad and his stands explicit. We knew what we were getting.

By contrast, Kevin Rudd, the new federal Opposition Leader, remains an unknown quantity for many. First elected to federal parliament in 1998, he was made a shadow minister in 2001 and his focus has been mainly on foreign affairs. He has not held a ministerial post, so we have never seen Rudd perform in an elected public office under pressure.

However, a future Rudd government might be assessed by examining Rudd's performance in relation to his pivotal role in the Queensland Goss Labor government.

Elected in 1989 in the wake of the Fitzgerald royal commission into corruption, the Goss government promised to implement Fitzgerald's agenda for parliamentary and public service reform, open government, electoral change, improved accountability and police reform.

Rudd was Goss's chief-of-staff in Opposition and in government, and then became director-general of the new office of cabinet. Given the office of cabinet's roles in overseeing the cabinet process, monitoring implementation, advising the premier and identifying policy issues, Rudd was de facto head of the Premier's Department, Goss's closest adviser, and the premier's Mr Fixit.

And fix Queensland government in favour of the Labor Party under the mantle of the Fitzgerald reform process the Goss government did. These actions tell us as much about Rudd, as they do about the Goss government.

Certainly there were worthwhile procedural changes, departmental restructurings and overdue electoral reform. However, aided and abetted by partisans such as Rudd and others recruited from academe and elsewhere, the Goss government implemented a new political fix of increased centralised control, partisan appointments across the public service, media management, continued executive dominance of Queensland's unicameral legislature and skilful containment of Fitzgerald's anti-corruption watchdogs such as the Criminal Justice Commission.

Where the Fitzgerald report suggested the public service needed to be able to "provide independent, impartial, expert advice" and to operate in an environment "without concern for the political or personal connections of the people and organisations affected by their decisions", the Goss reforms ensured greater political control through increased politicisation and centralised processes of a more competent administrative machine.

For instance, the Public Sector Management Commission established to oversee public service change was not a recommendation of Fitzgerald, although it was portrayed as such. It was seen by some to be run by those with Labor Party connections and as an instrument for increased executive and partisan control of the public service. As professor Ken Wiltshire commented, the changes led many public servants to "make a connection between the restructuring of the public service and the political allegiances of those overseeing it".

Indeed, Rudd's rapid promotion from ministerial minder to senior public servant highlighted this perception of politicisation. Rudd may have once been a Foreign Affairs officer, but as personal adviser to Goss and later a preselected federal Labor candidate, his loyalties were clear, as was the message to the public

service: partisanship counts.

Also, the replacement of many senior departmental heads and managers by those with Labor connections often smacked of revenge rather than reform, undermining the Fitzgerald principle of merit.

Moreover, Rudd ran the office of cabinet ruthlessly in relation to ministers and public servants in meeting the premier's demands. Rudd was known as Dr Death because of his single-mindedness of purpose and style. While administratively competent, Rudd's actions caused considerable strains within government, alienating many, and his narrow focus and dominance were seen as contributors to the Goss government's poor 1995 election result.

Elsewhere the stress was on control rather than democratic reform.

Parliamentary reform, identified by Fitzgerald as essential "if the political processes of public debate and opposition are to operate", hardly progressed. Parliamentary sittings averaged only 50 days a year: marginally more than the previous National Party government, but less than the 58-day average for Coalition governments from 1970 to 1983. Proposals for an expanded parliamentary committee system and more Opposition staff were truncated.

Janet Ransley from Griffith University concluded that "little ... has been achieved by way of lasting reform to the uneven balance between executive and parliament".

Recommendations for the auditor-general to conduct performance audits were rejected, while excellent new freedom-of-information legislation was later amended to maintain executive secrecy. Whether the Goss government used cabinet confidentiality rules to bypass FOI procedures, as the Borbidge and Beattie governments did, remains unknown.

There was ongoing conflict with the CJC in terms of resources, powers, membership and activities. The Goss



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Page 2 of 2



government bridled at the CJC's intrusions into executive decision-making. As Max Bingham, the CJC's first chairman, recalled, there "were competing agendas to lessen the impact of Fitzgerald's philosophy" and "almost daily there were messages from various political quarters that it would be a good idea if we were all to drop dead".

Meanwhile, the Electoral and Administrative Review Commission, another Fitzgerald innovation that provided recommendations on areas such as electoral reform and adminis-

trative law that were mostly accepted, was terminated — many thought prematurely — because, as professor John Wanna explained, it was a "source of policy advice [independent] from the conventional executive-dominated process".

In summary, the Goss government implemented the Fitzgerald report's recommendations in form but not in spirit. Executive government control, secrecy and manipulation of appointment processes remained embedded in Queensland government, as highlighted by the recent commission of

inquiry into the Bundaberg Hospital overseas doctor scandal.

To know what a Rudd Labor government might look like, take a peek at what happened in Queensland when Rudd held sway in the Goss government.

Every picture tells a story, and Queensland's not one to admire.

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