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Advising Howard: Interpreting changes in advisory and support structures for the Prime Minister of Australia

Anne Tiernan

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Abstract

John Howard, Prime Minister for nearly a decade, leads a disciplined Cabinet and, save for a few recent rumblings, a united and orderly backbench. He runs a tightly controlled political and policy agenda that unmistakably bears his personal stamp. How can John Howard's authority be understood and explained? While undoubtedly the product of his personality and working style, his formidable political skills, experience and renowned personal discipline, it may also be attributable to the substantial and sophisticated advisory infrastructure developed to support his prime ministership. This article surveys the key institutions that provide advice and support for John Howard's prime ministership, and assesses their effectiveness.

She would like to thank Professor Rod Rhodes, John Nethercote and two of the journal's anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on an earlier draft.

Notes

[1]A separate Department of the Cabinet Office was created by Prime Minister John Gorton in 1968. The two were amalgamated as the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) when William McMahon won the prime ministership in March 1968.

[2]For example, Primary Industries and Energy Secretary Paul Barratt returned to the public service from the Business Council of Australia (BCA) (Weller 2001, 74). Department of Finance Secretary Dr Peter Boxall, appointed in 1997, was drawn from the personal staff of Treasurer Peter Costello (Weller 2001, 71); he had previously been Under-Treasurer in South Australia, a post to which he had been appointed shortly after the election of Dean Brown's Liberal government in 1992, and had earlier worked for Opposition Leaders Andrew Peacock and John Hewson (Weller 2001, 71).

[3]All previous appointees (apart from John Menadue, appointed by Whitlam in 1974) had come from the ranks of the senior public service, though a number had a distinctly personal touch. For example, Shepherd in 1911 (see Hudson and Steele 1988); Lennox Hewitt in 1968 and Alan Carmody in 1976 (see Weller 2001, 24, 72).

[4]Government Personal Staff as at 1 February 2004–1 February 2005. Answers to questions on notice, Finance and Administration portfolio. Senate F&PA Legislation Committee's consideration of Additional Estimates, 21 February 2005.

[5]Keating had, on average, three media staff plus a speechwriter (Department of Administrative Services Ministerial Directory October 1992, March 1994, April 1995, October 1995).

[6]Government Personal Staff as at 1 February 2005.

[7]Ministerial Senior Staff Salaries, 30 January 2004—additional information provided by DoFA to the F&PA Committee's consideration of Additional Estimates, 20 February 2004.

[8]For a current list see <http://www.pmc.gov.au/initiatives/index.cfm>.

Additional information

Notes on contributors

Anne Tiernan
Anne Tiernan is a Postdoctoral Fellow with the Centre for Governance and Public Policy at Griffith University.

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