

## **John Howard the Great Communicator: No, Really!**

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### **Abstract**

The rough and tumble of John Howard's public school education left him with an electorally appealing ordinariness in a party renowned for a born to rule attitude. Howard was not brought up with the sense of *noblesse oblige* of an establishment figure such as Malcolm Fraser. His father owned a small petrol station and John Howard worked there on weekends while at school.

Howard's background may have made it more likely for him to accept the rhetoric of economic liberalism – self-reliance, markets and rising tides. It also helped shape his approach to political rhetoric. Howard's rhetoric, while not especially inspirational, is well crafted. It has assisted in cultivating his image of ordinariness. Once classified as a poor public speaker, Howard has grown in the Prime Ministership to present a carefully nuanced image. This paper identifies why Howard's rhetoric is successful: thorough preparation for an 'on message' delivery of information, his adept handling of interviews and his ability to present a compassionate persona in times of tragedy, such as following the Port Arthur shootings and Bali bombings. Howard's political rhetoric is compared with other modern Australian leaders. While many Labor leaders have a penchant for stirring speeches, Howard has a record of electorally appealing prose.

### **Introduction**

Barely a day would pass in Australian politics where journalistic or scholarly comment is not made upon the 'style' of John Howard as Australian Prime Minister. This is both a common and arguably distinctive line of inquiry. In consideration of the great volume of such commentary, some of which will be referred to in this paper, it appears that it represents a line of inquiry primarily concerned with characterising Howard's political or rhetorical style, rather than determining his overall position with respect to policy and ideology. Analysing his ideology or policy approach is a more clearly understood method of analysis. Over time a leader's stated positions and policy decisions can be summarised and critically evaluated to determine what it is that the leader actually believes as a matter of political ideology. Those beliefs can then be considered in a comparative context: they can be assessed with respect to other leader's political positions on like-issues and also with respect to defined positions in political philosophy and the history of ideas. Ultimately, any given leader's political character might be described by reference to some term or other which has some generally accepted common meaning. Hence a great deal of modern Australian inquiry revolves around

attempts to define whether Howard is better understood as a social conservative or an economic liberal reformer.

Whereas the inquiry into political style and rhetoric also ultimately tends towards the labelling of politicians with terms which possess some commonly understood meaning, it is by nature a distinct type of inquiry. In ancient Greece Aristotle defined the art of rhetoric as the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject. Unis (1996) has reviewed the rhetorical techniques used in ancient Athens, highlighting the importance of political rhetoric in both the private and public spheres. He also parallels the history of rhetoric with that of democracy in order to demonstrate its critical role. In modern times the content of political rhetoric is intrinsically complex, and emotionally charged (Rank, 2006). Modern investigations of Rhetoric have consequently come to be represented less by an interest in policy and more by an interest in the manner and means by which a political leader presents their political view to the media and through the media to the electors at large. Therefore the inquiry revolves around the form and style of language and the verbal presentation of various ideas. In addition, this type of inquiry is concerned with the manner in which a leader generally characterizes him or herself and their motivations for supporting a particular position and how their appeals for support to the electorate are framed and to what principles they are verbally referenced. In this paper the subject is Australia's current Prime Minister, John Howard.<sup>1</sup>

Rhetorical techniques can be classified in two ways: when people communicate they intensify some things and downplay others. The common techniques to intensify include repetition, association and composition, while the common techniques for downplay include omission, diversion and confusion. Howard, in the course of his long political career, has used all such techniques. Language can be a powerful weapon for winning public support (Zheng, 2000). This is especially the case in the present information age, allowing leaders to use various mediums to deliver political messages. However, the modern environment has also complicated the study of political rhetoric. Howard, as with all modern leaders, uses speech writers and media advisers to assist in crafting his rhetorical style. Such collaboration pervades formal speeches, media releases, interviews and even sound bites. The selectivity in reporting by the media further refines a leader's rhetorical message. Modern political rhetoric is hard to analyse because it is often fragmented. This is not the first time ANZCA has hosted a paper on political rhetoric (see for example Ashwell and Olsson, 2002). The role of political rhetoric is important. According to Fumaroli (1983, p. 253) rhetoric is the connective tissue peculiar to civil society.

Of course like many dichotomies the dichotomy between political or rhetorical style on the one hand and the content of a leader's political and ideological character on the other is an oversimplification which is, in some respects, useful for analysis. In other respects there is an obvious artificiality

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<sup>1</sup> The authors are writing a biography on John Howard for Melbourne University Press due for release in mid 2007.

in attempting to independently analyse a politician's style as separated from their substantive ideological beliefs. It is clear that some commentators in their attempts to ascribe a distinctive style to Howard find only the lack of distinctiveness to be unique.

There is in Howard no cadence, no poetry, no elegance of language, little that is memorable ... but after the grandeur, hauteur, vanity and pride of our last four prime ministers – the first and fourth of whom had cadence in spades – a more prosaic prime minister might be right for our times. (Adams 2000, p15)

This paper will point to certain consistently identifiable characteristics which emerge upon investigation and which, when taken together, mark Howard as an entirely distinctive political communicator, albeit with an ordinariness not common amongst recent Australian Prime Ministers.

### **Howard's Political Communication**

Attempts to characterise any given leader's political style appear plagued by the absence of even a useful starting point for analysis. Indeed, whereas various descriptions of political style might ultimately exist, whether a commentator characterises a leader as 'statesmen like' or 'a person of the people' might be as much a matter of taste as inquiry. Similar problems ensue when analysing political leadership (Barton and van Onselen 2003, p.120).

Analysis for this paper will commence its inquiry by borrowing a term of reference used by the liberal philosopher Isaiah Berlin, which he employed in his investigations of various intellectual thinkers (most notably Tolstoy); and commence by asking the question: is Howard in political style a fox or hedgehog?

Berlin made reference to a line by the Greek poet Archilochus that, '(t)he fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing'. In its application to the history of political ideas Berlin saw this distinction as mirroring a distinction between thinkers as follows:

But, taken figuratively, the words can be made to yield a sense in which they mark one of the deepest differences which divide writers and thinkers, and, it may be, human beings in general. For there exists a great chasm between those, on one side, who relate everything to a single central vision, one system less or more coherent or articulate, in terms of which they understand, think and feel—a single, universal, organizing principle in terms of which alone all that they are and say has significance—and, on the other side, those who pursue many ends, often unrelated and even contradictory, connected, if at all, only in some *de facto* way, for some psychological or physiological cause, related by no moral or aesthetic principle; these last lead lives, perform acts, and entertain ideas that are centrifugal rather than centripetal, their thought is scattered or diffused, moving on many levels, seizing upon the essence of a vast variety of experiences and objects for what they are in themselves, without consciously or unconsciously, seeking to fit them into, or exclude them from, any one unchanging, all-embracing, sometimes self-contradictory and incomplete, at times

fanatical, unitary inner vision. The first kind of intellectual and artistic personality belongs to the hedgehogs, the second to the foxes. (Berlin 1953)

Placing to one side for the moment Berlin's use of this framework to investigate political ideas, if there can be derived some assistance from applying this distinction to the idea of an extant political style, it becomes clear that arguably there has been no greater fox in Australian politics than John Howard. Of the many things that Howard knows in the realm of political style, several are clearly and repeatedly discernable.

We have written elsewhere of the sophisticated communications organisation and strategy that the Howard government has built (see for example van Onselen and Errington (2004), Errington and van Onselen (2005) and van Onselen and Errington (2005)). Yet, billions of dollars of communications infrastructure is no substitute for a political leader who can take advantage of regular appearances in the mass media. Howard's lack of charisma marked an obvious contrast with Bob Hawke during the 1987 electoral campaign. Yet the success of Howard and long-serving former New South Wales Premier Bob Carr shows the limits of charisma as an explanatory variable to successful use of political rhetoric. In many respects, Howard is a media manager's dream. He is almost always on message. In contrast to most of his Labour opponents over the years, he takes a close interest in both Liberal Party campaigns and government communications strategies.<sup>2</sup> His media appearances therefore unfailingly complement whatever the government or the party is trying to achieve with its paid media and other tactics.

Asked about his vision for Australia, the response of John Howard as opposition leader was telling. He wanted Australians to be 'relaxed and comfortable'. Derided by many observers, Howard's attitude marked a stark contrast with Prime Minister Keating's colourful rhetoric about Australia's place in the world. Howard has no regrets about his seemingly banal vision for the nation:

When I spoke of this country being relaxed and comfortable, I spoke of it being confident and proud of its past, relaxed and confident in that sense, and I also speak of it being confident about its present and optimistic about its future (Howard 1997).

In 1996, the platform, for the most part, matched this soothing message. In contrast to both the 1993 Fightback campaign and Howard's own 1987 election campaign, the Coalition was promising to maintain Labor's levels of public expenditure were it to win government. If true, this was a significant departure both rhetorically and as a policy. Previous Liberal Party oppositions had openly championed the need for minimal government in a neo-pluralist sense, providing the Labour Party with the opportunity to run scare campaigns citing prospective cuts in government spending programs were

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<sup>2</sup> See van Onselen and Errington 2005.

the Liberals to win office. Howard was not prepared to suffer electorally on this score.<sup>3</sup>

The Coalition's 1996 campaign theme, 'for all of us', came under attack as dog whistle politics (most notably from Aboriginal leader Noel Pearson, who later made his peace with the government). Former Keating speech writer, Don Watson, similarly attacked the slogan (2002, p. 712). Howard's criticisms of multiculturalism and Aboriginal reconciliation may well have attracted many supporters with somewhat 'racist' agendas. Dog whistling is not the perfect political weapon, it is a strategy that can backfire (*National Indigenous Times*, 9 June 2005). However, those same 'racist' supporters were central to Howard's more conservative approach to cultural matters. Howard's second stint as opposition leader saw this conservatism wrapped in an equally conservative rhetorical style. He learnt an important lesson when his comments about the level of migration from Asia created a storm in 1988. As Prime Minister, he may offend people with his policies, but words should only ever be used to lower the political temperature.

'Relaxed and comfortable' is also a suitable slogan for economic prosperity. The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax, for example, was never going to be the spur for soaring heights of rhetoric. On the other hand, a Prime Minister without a stirring vision for the nation might need to paper over the fact with stirring speeches. Howard's balancing act of economic reformer and friend of the battler has become harder in this his fourth term given the governments increased pace of reform courtesy of its Senate majority. Howard thus falls back increasingly to his rhetoric about acting 'in the national interest' (*ABC Radio AM*, 12 July 2005). His soothing language, however, has not made privatisation, or industrial relations reform any more popular. Leaving aside the notion of what is right for the times (political leaders make their rhetoric seem right for the times by winning elections), the important point is that Howard has made a success out of prosaic prose.

### **Just an Ordinary Bloke?**

Howard's parents were a part of the class that Liberal Party founder Robert Menzies appealed to as the 'forgotten people' in his radio broadcasts. Howard, too, makes extensive use of radio, though Menzies would no doubt have been appalled by the vacuousness of talkback today. '(H)e [Howard] uses the media as an instrument to reach the people' (Kelly 2006, p. 11). But Howard also recognises the importance of newspaper headlines. Tiffen (2006, p.2) cites Howard's 2005 call for more religion in Christmas as an example of an easy headline for the Prime Minister. Incumbency makes media management much easier. Howard's career in politics alone separates him from the tag of 'ordinary'. Howard's ability to interact with people, and his mundane style, nevertheless present as ordinary. Not that this has limited Howard's ability to impact on policy as a follow-up to his deliberately mundane rhetoric. Howard's attacks on federalism have been more damaging

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<sup>3</sup> It is a matter of public record that the first Howard/Costello budget in 1996 included significant cuts to government spending.

than those mounted by Whitlam, even if Whitlam's attacks were delivered with a rhetorical flare (Errington 2003, p.20).

Additionally, Howard's extra-ordinary political skills heighten his awareness of the electoral value in appearing ordinary. The equanimity with which Howard handles the whinging and moaning callers that talkback radio specialises in is typical of his approach to politics. He seeks to defuse confrontation both through his non-committal responses and his calm manner. Rhetorically this approach is representative of the downplay technique referred to previously. Howard diverts from answering uncomfortable questions. He is a master of engendering a sense of confusion by giving an answer that may not always correlate with the question being asked, but without appearing overly complicated and out of touch. His 'one tone fits all sobriety of response' is an important part of Howard's skill as a media performer (Tiffen 2005, p.4).

Salusinszky (2006, p.203) argues that Howard has 'perfected the tone of the cautious, understated, suburban man'. Howard himself has underlined the importance of this rhetorical style, but perhaps more importantly, of keeping in touch with the concerns of ordinary Australians:

**JOHN HOWARD:** People like the fact that they can relate to me. And if they feel that way then that's good. I've never tried to cut myself off from ordinary people. I say I've conducted a perpetual conversation with the Australian people and I've tried to do that.

**KERRY O'BRIEN:** Is it in your mind that that is a role you measure yourself against?

**JOHN HOWARD:** You could put it that way. I think people like being able to talk to their Prime Minister, whoever he or she may be in relaxed situations. I have found over the last 10 years that mixing with Australians at big gatherings often give you clues as to how they are thinking. I've never forgotten the experience of the 2001 Rugby League Grand Final which was only a few weeks out from the 2001 election, and if you've been in public life for a long time, you can pick up a bit of a feeling from some of those gatherings. I came away feeling that we were in for a real show because a Rugby League Grand Final is a great cross-section of the Australian public.

**KERRY O'BRIEN:** So you are obviously quite comfortable with the ordinariness, or averageness if I can put it that way?

**JOHN HOWARD:** Oh, very. (*ABC 7.30 Report*. 2 March 2006)

Of course, it is impossible for the holder of the most powerful office in the land to be anything but isolated from the concerns of voters. Indeed, it is Howard's awareness of the fact that some of his core beliefs conflict with those of the majority of Australians that he works hard to find a balance between strong leadership and bending with the political winds. Nevertheless, there is an authenticity about Howard that a lifetime in politics has yet to erase.

I believe in being average and ordinary. One of the reasons I do is that's who I am. I'm out of the lower middle class of Australia if you can use that kind of expression. That's my background. I'm very proud of it.

That's who I am. The other thing is that Australians are deeply sceptical people. It's one of the great differences between Australians and Americans. We're far more sceptical than the Americans. They [Australians] spot humbug and pretension and people who have delusions of grandeur and they spot it very quickly and they're unerring in their instinct. (*7.30 Report*. 2 March 2006)

Howard's electoral success almost certainly owes much to the rhetorical style he has employed to avoid a perception of arrogance, particularly for a government over ten years in office, as happened to Paul Keating towards the end of his government. Howard's image of ordinariness, however, masks some of his extraordinary strengths. John Howard's discipline is arguably his greatest political quality, and one that may well earn him the respect of the electorate and even his opponents. It wasn't always a hallmark of his leadership, however. Howard's greatest piece of luck was losing the 1987 election. At that time his weaknesses as a political leader clearly outweighed his strengths. On a range of issues, Howard had yet to show the pragmatism that would be the hallmark of his Prime Ministership. For example, Howard learned from the controversy surrounding his comments on Asian immigration to moderate his political rhetoric. Most importantly, though, he persevered. You can only be in the right place at the right time in politics if you don't quit before your time arrives. Few leaders would have suffered the blows from their own side of politics that Howard did, and stuck around for more. Howard's perseverance doesn't necessarily come from some great moral strength. It may be that Howard, a Young Liberal President and long term party member and activist, would not have wanted to consider a career outside of politics.

Winning the 1996 election was no simple task, even if after the fact it now looks like it was. We need to remember the eulogies for the Liberal Party that were published after the 1993 election.<sup>4</sup> Before Howard replaced Downer in the leadership in 1995, the Coalition was trailing the ALP in the polls. The January 1995 News poll, a matter of days before Howard replaced Downer in the leadership, showed the Coalition primary vote at 40 percent while the ALP primary vote was at 46 percent <<http://www.newspoll.com.au>>. Howard showed enormous discipline throughout 1995 in keeping the focus on the government with his 'five minutes of economic sunshine' mantra (a rare display of rhetorical flare in the parliament).

Howard's discipline and attention to detail make him the perfect leader in the perpetual campaigns in which modern politics is fought (Mann and Ornstein 2000). Through his private office and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Howard keeps tabs on activities across his government. His centralist style of administration, both within his party and ministry, and with respect to Commonwealth-State relations, puts the onus on Howard to appear well briefed in public on an enormous variety of issues. Yet, he rarely puts a foot wrong in his extensive dealings with the media. While Howard has often been found wanting during the formal campaign period, losing televised

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Chris Puplick's (1994) *Is the Party Over?* (Melbourne, Text).

debates against Beazley and Latham, the ground work that the government (or, in 1996, the opposition) has put in during the months and years leading up to the formal campaign need to be underlined. Winning the 1998 election while losing the two-party preferred vote was an indication that the Coalition had finally caught up with Labour in the area of marginal seat campaigning. While incumbency makes this easier, Howard's attention as leader to both political strategy and policy detail have been important contributors. Close observers of Howard's election campaigns frequently come away uninspired - and surprised that Howard manages to win. Doubts about Howard's campaigning skills arise from not taking into account things such as the extensive party advertising carefully tailored to both reinforcing long-term Coalition messages and deal with the daily issues of the campaign (van Onselen and Errington 2005). In stark contrast to Mark Latham's 2004 campaign, Howard works closely with the party organisation to ensure a seamless campaign, and his rhetoric almost always fits within this superstructure.

Howard's instructions to Coalition members and supporters on the occasion of the government's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary were typical of both his caution and thoroughness. He sought to avoid the hubris at the corresponding ALP celebrations of 1993 (stills of a skylarking Gareth Evans were featured in Coalition television advertising in 1996). It may also be the case that we are more prepared to forgive an ordinary bloke for his sins than we would be a leader whom we put on a pedestal. The sins during Howard's Prime Ministership, of course, have been many, and struck at the heart of the 'honest John' concept that helped Howard into government in 1996.

#### **Honest John: Setting the Agenda**

John Howard first picked up the nickname 'Honest John' during the Fraser government years. At the time it was a sarcastic characterisation following the 1980 election campaign image of a fist-full of dollars used by the Coalition government which contrasted with the budget shortfalls Howard as Treasurer presided over. During his time in opposition the characterisation as 'Honest John' took on, and was given, a positive spin. It is a reminder of just how long Howard has been deflecting the slings and arrows of Australian politics. Howard is nothing if not a known quantity. In recent years, Howard's honesty has been brought into question a number of times: The children overboard affair, weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and the Australian Wheat Board scandal are examples.

**KERRY O'BRIEN:** But Mackay talks of the paradox about the public perception and I'll stress perception, that you misled people on kids overboard created the distinction between core and non-core promises. Went to war in Iraq based on false information, that you never seem to know about the kinds of scandals that developed in 10 years of Government. On the other hand, he says, the public has this high level of respect for you. If that perception and yet that respect are out there and quite widely held according to Mackay, why do you think that is? We're talking perceptions?

**JOHN HOWARD:** It's very hard for me to answer that, because I don't convincingly lie

**KERRY O'BRIEN:** You're not a good liar?

**JOHN HOWARD:** A very bad one. I don't convincingly lie as Hugh says. I really don't.

**KERRY O'BRIEN:** When did you learn that? That you don't lie very well?

**JOHN HOWARD:** If I'm a person who sort of feels - if I'm confronted with an awkward question, it shows. (*7.30 Report*. 2 March 2006)

Howard's answer to O'Brien's final question is illustrative of his rhetorical use of downplay through diversion. O'Brien provocatively asked when Howard learned he was not a good liar, implying he had lied to learn he was not good at it. Howard simply continued his answer to the previous question, ignoring the implication and the question O'Brien subsequently asked. Howard's body language certainly does signal his discomfort with difficult questioning. He clears his throat and moves his shoulders. His surprisingly candid response to O'Brien's question indicates that this is perhaps something he has discussed with his media minders. If so, it is representative of both Howard's professionalism in dealing with the media and learning from his mistakes.

Howard benefits from public cynicism about politicians and political honesty. Howard exploited this fact in the 2004 election campaign. Many observers were flabbergasted at Howard's chutzpah in designating the election a fight over whom voters could trust.<sup>5</sup> Trust is about the ability to deliver as much as it is about perceptions of honesty. Newspoll has indicated that on the 'trust' characteristic John Howard Prime Minister has slipped from John Howard opposition leader <<http://www.newspoll.com.au>>. Howard's (and his close friend Graeme Morris's) decision to use 'trust' as an introductory theme for the 2004 election highlights his fox like skills in adapting as is politically required.

With many of the government's policies unpopular with the electorate,<sup>6</sup> setting the news agenda has been crucial to Howard's political success. Howard uses the breakfast radio stations (only his preferred commentators to avoid uncertainties) to set the agenda for the day, often giving interviews before himself having breakfast: 'His [Howard] core tactic is to set the agenda and have his opponents defined according to that agenda' (Kelly 2006 p. 11). Howard defuses controversy over unpopular measures by calmly but persistently putting his position, peppering his media appearances with his stock phrases such as 'mainstream' and 'national interest'.<sup>7</sup> This tactic is symptomatic of the intensity rhetorical technique of repetition. Tiffen contrasts this approach, which he calls 'defensive spin', with the crash through or crash approach of some ALP leaders. He cites Keating's 'recession we had to have'

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Peter Hartcher, 'What Lies Beneath', *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 21-22 August 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Newspoll has identified industrial relations, the GST, anti-terrorism legislation and the sale of Telstra as unpopular legislative initiatives <<http://www.newspoll.com.au>>. Of course all governments present unpopular legislation, and the Howard government has had its share of popular legislation as well.

<sup>7</sup> There are exceptions to Howard's discipline, of course. His remark that 'they sunk the damn boat' when reminded by a journalist of the children overboard affair in 2006 is an example [source. *The Oz*].

comment at a news conference in 1990 (2005, p.4). Keating's 'banana republic' comments can be similarly viewed. Mark Latham's combative rhetoric about everything from school funding to the relative merits of American presidents provide other examples. These types of contrasts reflect real differences in temperament, not just alternative media tactics.

Of course, Howard's very careful use of language does not endear him to everybody. His attempt to divide election promises into 'core' and 'non-core' was widely ridiculed. However much logic there may be in such a position (the spending cuts in the 1996 budgets were aimed primarily at non-core Coalition constituencies such as universities, ATSI and the ABC), it is one best left for others to interpret.

One interviewer described a lengthy interview with Howard shortly before his second stint as opposition leader. Repeatedly asking Howard about Alexander Downer's future as leader, John Doyle recalled that 'whichever corner I tried to box him into, he deftly changed from a solid to a gas, only to reappear as a solid on another part of the canvas, with me clumsily smoting the air' (Doyle 2005). This evasive style makes Howard simultaneously accountable yet untouchable. He regularly appears on ABC current affairs programs, but has developed a method for answering (or not answering) questions that render those appearances (to say nothing of parliament question time) ineffective as mechanisms of genuine political accountability.<sup>8</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The political communication of John Howard is not easily located. His government communications strategy is highly professionalised. Howard himself generally stays on message, rarely deviating from his script. Such practice fits neatly within his perpetual election approach to governance. It also fits with his image of ordinariness. By staying on message Howard avoids both the rhetorical flare and failure of former Prime Ministers such as Paul Keating. Howard's avoidance of 'off-the-cuff' commentary during the political cycle starves his opponents of sound bites they can use against him during election campaigns. At first instance John Howard does not present as a great communicator: he loses election debates and does not inspire the public as many of his political opponents have. However, modern campaigns are more easily lost than won by engaging in flamboyant prose. Howard

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<sup>8</sup> While the Howard government comes under fire from conservatives for having failed to tame the ABC's supposedly progressive culture, ABC interviewers do appear sensitive to Coalition criticism that persistent questioning of government figures is somehow biased. Even the best of them let Howard off the hook by not cornering him on important issues. BBC journalists have a generally more aggressive style of interviewing. That organisation's premier television current affairs host, Jeremy Paxman, famously asked a politician the same question 16 times until he got a satisfactory answer. Such an approach has not been tried in Australia. Inability to pin ministers down on important questions is partly due to government media management. One tactic is to flood journalists with leaks and press releases whenever controversy is in the offing. An example was the 2006 release of a media discussion paper which begged questions of government favouritism of incumbent media interests. The report was accompanied by speculation about advertising being allowed on the ABC, guaranteed to distract those interviewing the minister, Helen Coonan, from the contents of the discussion paper (see, for example, *ABC 7.30 Report*. 14 March 2006).

knows this, and the mundane style he adopts suits his temperament and satisfies his party's electoral interests.

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