

THE PUBLIC POLICY FORUM PRESENTS

THE CAMPAIGN MANAGERS



The 1988 New South Wales Election Campaign

– by the people who ran it.

THE CAMPAIGN MANAGERS SPEAK.
THE 1988 NEW SOUTH WALES ELECTION.

FOREWORD

The conference on which this book is based was a remarkable event in Australian politics. Three and a half months after the voters of New South Wales had given the Liberal Party its first mainland election victory in five years, a small university lecture theatre became the venue for an unprecedented replay of that campaign. Key campaign managers of the Labor, Liberal and National parties came together to discuss, on the record, the crucial rôles they played in determining the course and the outcome of the election.

Nick Greiner's resounding defeat of Premier Barrie Unsworth on 19 March, 1988, made him the first Liberal in a decade to lead Australia's largest state. Decisively, his victory brought the Wran era to an end. Labor Ministers and M.P.s in seats once considered the heartland of the ALP found themselves unemployed. Inner city independents who had campaigned on a shoestring found themselves elected as Members of Parliament. The ripples of the Greiner win spread as far as Canberra, with Liberals optimistically claiming that Labor's national tide had been turned.

In all, the election post-mortems that have analysed the reasons for, and the implications of, this watershed victory, just about everyone has had a say—except, that is, for Greiner's closest group of political advisers, who had helped plan and achieve the victory, and their Labor counterparts, who had worked day and night in vain to prevent it.

For all their political influence, campaign managers are usually a secretive bunch. And they work hard to keep it that way.

But at this conference, they broke their silence.

On 2 July, 1988, the Public Policy Forum and the Australian Graduate School of Management at the University of New South Wales brought together ten of the principal managers of the Greiner and Unsworth campaigns for a day-long review of their thoughts and decisions during the State election campaign.

The following day, managers from independent campaigns and representatives of prominent special interest groups gathered to share their experiences of the campaign.

Campaign managers are the "new machine men" of Australian politics. With electoral strategy increasingly becoming a political priority year in and year out, with the media posing ever more onerous demands on our political leaders, and with election campaigns becoming ever more expensive and technologically sophisticated, campaign managers have an increasingly important rôle to perform, in both the Labor and the coalition parties.

The last time some of the Greiner and Unsworth people had met had been a testy exchange in the bar of the State Parliament in Macquarie Street at the height of the campaign, a meeting that as they reveal in the transcript was just another battle in the war of nerves that goes on during a campaign.

But, while campaign managers are resolutely partisan, they are not—in the way they perform their tasks—very different from each other.

Regardless of their party affiliation, the job of the campaign managers is to interpret the public mood through their opinion polling, and to mold it through their campaign advertising. They schedule their leaders' itineraries to maximise their impact in crucial marginal seats, and they determine if and when the leaders will appear before the ever-present camera crews. Campaign managers broadly share the belief that campaigns are won or lost on the T.V. screen and that a good political day is one in which the leader's scheduled media event gets covered on the evening news. They are the "senior campaign sources" whose leaks and briefings vie to set the terms for how the media report the campaign.

Increasingly, the campaign managers are the professionals in the political scene, the men—and, rarely, the women—responsible for the year-round political strategy of our elected leaders.

Operators for the smaller contenders—the independent candidates and the single issues parties—are increasingly adopting the assumptions of these major campaign managers and, within the limits of a shoestring budget and volunteer organisation, are seeking to emulate their work.

It was these diverse rivals who were brought together by the Public Policy Forum and the AGSM for the conference in July.

For all their diversity and rivalry, the discussions they held were pervaded by an unparalleled candour and openness, a willingness to share insights and in-jokes, a mutual sense of cautious respect, and an unmistakable delight in narrating war stories to fellow campaign veterans. They passed verdicts on each other's television advertisements. They discussed confidential opinion research, and they went public about some of their private meetings. The rifts and rivalries within party organisations which, particularly on the Liberal side, have become spectacularly apparent since the campaign are very evident between the lines here.

This transcript of their discussion has been edited only for reasons of space, and represents a full and fair version of their exchange.

Of course, no discussion could present a completely unvarnished version of the truth about everything that happened during an election campaign. At this conference, some closed doors remained firmly closed. Some people declined the invitation to attend. Some contentious issues were broached only warily.

At base, however, the participants in this exchange wanted to get out as much of the story as they felt they could. That is a tribute to their sense of public interest in telling a story that should be told but that so often goes untold—and it's testimony to their thirst, as political insiders, for hard political news.

Here is the anatomy of the modern political campaign, exposed by those who know it best.

The body of published material about Australian election campaigns is growing rapidly. Journalists are providing increasingly comprehensive commentaries of events both during campaigns and afterwards and increasingly sophisticated biographical studies—although analysis of the media's own involvement in a campaign has still to be written. Political scientists are providing

more and more commentary of their own, backed with steadily more detailed statistical analysis of voter behaviour and with gradually more informed studies of political participants. Specialists such as communications theorists are getting in on the act.

But there is still a shortage of quality literature which can boast the active collaboration of campaign decision makers themselves—partly because of the traditional reticence of campaign participants and partly because of the fact that, when they do indulge in reminiscences, they tend inevitably to be one-sided. This book seeks to help plug that gap.

But for all its novelty in an Australian context, the idea for this conference was borrowed from an American model—which gives it something in common with many other innovations on the Australian electoral scene. The Institute of Politics of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University has hosted conferences of Presidential campaign managers since 1972, and it was these that provided the model for the Sydney conference.

Thanks are also due to the Australian Graduate School of Management, and especially its Dean and Director, Jeremy Davis, and senior lecturer Ian Marsh for their hospitality and generous support in staging the conference, and to Robert Marks, editor of the *Australian Journal of Management*.

This was the first of what is planned as a series of conferences staged by the Public Policy Forum. The Forum is a new organisation made up of a diverse group of people involved in public policy making. It seeks to serve as a venue for the clarification of complex public policy choices by providing timely information through commissioned research and by focusing the talents of policy experts through open conferences.

Three of the moderators of the conference were members of the Public Policy Forum: Peter Thompson, compere of ABC Radio's current affairs program *AM*; Stephen Mills, author of *The New Machine Men*, Penguin, 1986; and Jonathan West, then of the Melbourne *Herald's* Canberra bureau. The fourth moderator was Milton Cockburn, who edited the *Sydney Morning Herald's* election coverage and is the co-author of *Wran an Unauthoried Biography*, Allen and Unwin, 1986. The MC on July 2 was another Forum member, Christine Nixon, Senior Policy Adviser to the N.S.W. Police Commissioner, and formerly a Research Fellow at the Kennedy School, Harvard.

Grant Freeland, assisted by Jane Craig, provided valuable research leading up to the conference. Lyndal Knight, Carol Garrety and Fay Barbour transcribed the tapes with accuracy and patience, and Siriol Giffney edited the transcript for publication.

But it was the campaign managers themselves who, for their willingness to attend and their frankness in speaking, deserve most thanks. Those in the first session, with their job titles at 19 March were:

Australian Labor Party:
Stephen Loosley General Secretary, New South Wales Branch.
John Della Bosca Assistant Secretary, N.S.W. Branch.
Shane Easson Executive Officer, Premier's Office.
Bob Cornish Group Account Director, John Singleton Advertising.

Liberal Party:
Ian Kortlang Principal Private Secretary,
 Office of the Leader of the Opposition.
Gary Sturgess Director of research and policy development,
 Office of the Leader of the Opposition.
John Stirton Adviser, Office of the Leader of the Opposition.
Greg Daniel Managing director, The Campaign Palace.
Ron Klein Director, Brian Sweeney and Associates.

National Party:
Jenny Gardiner Secretary, N.S.W. Branch.

Participants in the second session were:
Clover Moore Independent Candidate for Bligh.
Fred Nile M.L.C. Call to Australia.
Jeff Lambert Wilderness Society.
Judy Lambert Wilderness Society.
Vince Phillips Eden Monaro Survival Group.
Robyn Loydell Eden Monaro Survival Group.

Observers:
Ernie Chaples Sydney University.
Barry Aldrich Public Policy Forum.
Brian Knox Public Policy Forum.

Stephen Mills
Canberra, December 1988.

CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS

From the Wran resignation to the Greiner triumph.

1984

March: Premier Neville Wran wins his fourth election with a 17 seat majority of 58 seats to 38 for the Liberal/National

Party Opposition, with three independents, Wran won 49.4% of the vote, with L/NP recording 42.6% and other parties and independents 8%.

1986

- June:* Wran announces retirement at N.S.W. State Conference. Barrie Unsworth selected as his replacement.
- July:* In by-elections, ALP loses Wran's former seat of Bass Hill to the Liberals with a swing of more than 16%. Unsworth just manages to shift to the Lower House, winning Rockdale by 54 votes.

1987

- January:* Unsworth Government retains seats of Bankstown and Heathcote in a by-election, suffering a large swing against it in Bankstown, but attaining a small swing towards it in Heathcote.
- May:* Unsworth loses Northern Tablelands seat to the National Party with 4% swing. Morgan Gallup poll published in *The Bulletin* shows ALP just leading L/NP 47% to 44%.
- Spring:* Unsworth Government endures torrid session of Parliament with Opposition attacking, health, education, housing and administration of prisons.

1988

- January:* ALP runs "Good Value" campaign to bolster Unsworth leadership image. Morgan Gallup shows L/NP substantially ahead of Labor 48.5% to 40.5%, with Greiner holding an approval rating lead over Unsworth of 45% to 43%.
- 26th: Peak of Bicentennial celebrations with Australia Day festivities on Sydney Harbour.
- 31st: Bob Carr accuses Opposition over Harris-Daishowa donation.
- February:*
- 1st: Story breaks that ALP failed to disclose Harris-Daishowa donation during Federal election. Federal Minister Mick Young and N.S.W. ALP Secretary Stephen Loosley embroiled.

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- 2nd: Unsworth reveals election likely to be held in March.
6th: Hawke Government shocked by loss of Adelaide by-election, interpreted as indicating deep resentment among Labor's heartland voters, and sparking a sudden drop in N.S.W. Labor's opinion poll ratings.
8th: Mick Young resigns.
13/14th: ALP campaign managers completely revise election strategy.
16th: Unsworth admits, "we are behind".
22th: Unsworth announces 19 March election date.
28th: ALP screens controversial "Octopus" ad (Advertisement 5).
March:
6th: Greiner policy launch, Rockdale.
9th: Unsworth launch, Bankstown; *Sydney Morning Herald* runs Alan Ramsey's front page story. "Why Labor thinks Kate Greiner is their secret weapon".
11th: News of Mick Young's appointment to QANTAS.
19th: Unsworth Government defeated. Nick Greiner becomes Premier.

ALP:	38.9%
L/NP:	49.4%
Dem:	1.7%
Others:	10.0%