

## QUEENSLAND

### Stafford By-Election

A by-election in the state seat of Stafford was necessitated by the death on 21 June 1984 of the ALP incumbent, Dr Denis Murphy. It will be recalled that Dr Murphy first won the seat at the October 1983 general election, doing so by the narrow margin of 39 votes over the National party's candidate, Mr Pat Blake. On that occasion the then Liberal member of nine-years standing, Mr Terry Gygar, ran third, his performance mirroring the poor electoral showing statewide of the Liberals at that poll. Interestingly too, it was the leakage of 15 per cent of Mr Gygar's preferences which secured Dr Murphy's election, rather than Mr Blake's, in 1983.

The very considerable significance of the Stafford contest was reflected in the vigor of each party's campaign, and in the sustained media focus on the candidates and issues in the several weeks preceding the 4 August polling date. Labor had the most to lose in Stafford. The party had, after all, only won Stafford ten months beforehand, and although its hold on the seat was only a tenuous one in terms of the October 1983 result, the ALP could expect to benefit from any anti-government swing in the metropolitan area. A failure by Labor to hold one of its own city seats in a by-election situation would be particularly damaging to the party's stocks in terms of maintaining political momentum in the lead-up to the 1986 state poll. In those terms it was not surprising that the ALP selected as its candidate Mrs Janine Walker, a prominent ABC broadcaster and well known Brisbane identity. The Liberals, on the other hand, had nothing to lose. They had held Stafford for nine years up until 1983, and while they had run behind the Nationals and the ALP in the seat at the 1983 poll, the by-election provided them with an unexpectedly early opportunity to regain lost ground, and as a party to take one step forward political re-legitimation in Queensland state politics. Their candidate was former member, Mr Terry Gygar, who had lost the seat in 1983. For the Nationals Stafford provided an opportunity of another kind. Although they had made significant forays into the Brisbane metropolitan area at the October 1983 general election, they had polled relatively poorly in the Archerfield by-election earlier in 1984; in other words, the Nationals' aim in Stafford was to show that 1983 had not been a political fluke. The nationals' candidate was again Mr Pat Blake, who as indicated earlier ran so close against Dr Murphy in 1983.

The Liberals won Stafford in a very tight finish. Although the primary vote favoured the ALP's Mrs Walker (45.2 per cent), as against Mr Gygar's 27.5 per cent, and Mr Blake's 27.3 per cent, there was only a 3.6 per cent leakage of National party preferences to the ALP. This enabled Mr Gygar to win the seat, on a 2-party preferred basis, with 8061 votes compared to Mrs Walker's 6907. Interestingly, there was only a margin of 39 votes between the primary tallies of the two non-Labor candidates. Had Mr Blake in fact outpolled Mr Gygar in that primary count, Mrs Walker may have won the seat, as there was a leakage of between 17 and 18 per cent of Liberal preferences to Labor. This relatively *'undisciplined'*

behaviour by a significant proportion of Liberal voters was no doubt clearly a signal that the wounds of the 1983 coalition crisis had not yet healed.

### Political Parties

The Stafford result was the more pleasing for the Liberals, given that political life for that party in Queensland had been distinctly uncomfortable over the several preceding months. In early July, just a month prior to the Stafford contest, a former executive member of the state Liberal party and the unsuccessful Liberal candidate for Windsor at the 1983 election, Mrs Ann Garms, resigned from the party to join the Nationals. A week later Mr Col Miller, the Liberal member for the inner western-Brisbane electorate of Ithaca, also resigned from the party, his resignation apparently at least partly sparked by the endorsement of Mr Terry Gygar as the Liberal candidate for the Stafford by-election (Gygar had been closely associated with the events which led to the coalition collapse in 1983). Although there was speculation that Miller intended—like ministers Don Lane and Brian Austin, and former minister Sam Doumany—to join the Nationals, in fact he chose to sit on the parliamentary cross-benches as an *'Independent Liberal'*. In any case, Miller's departure from the Liberal ranks provided the Nationals with a slightly wider margin for manoeuvring in the context of parliamentary debates.

It also became clear later in the year that the Nationals' hostility toward the Liberals in no way had abated. In late October and early November the premier refused on a number of occasions to confirm or deny reports that he intended to block the appointment of Mr Warwick Parer, a mining industry executive, to the Senate casual vacancy left by the decision of Senator Kathy Martin to contest the newly created House of Representatives seat of Moncrieff. In the end the premier did not attempt to block the Liberals' nomination, though he probably had little choice in the matter given the passage of the 1977 referendum proposal dealing with the filling of such senate vacancies.

The National party held its 49th annual state conference at Rockhampton in July. Amongst other things, the conference agreed to write into the party's platform a statement supporting the mining and enrichment of uranium. The party also agreed to support mandatory life imprisonment for people convicted of hard drug trafficking. A major issue dealt with by the conference was that of party nominations for the senate ticket, and the order of placement of those names. That debate resulted in the selection of Senator Ron Boswell to head the ticket (Boswell was first elected to the Senate at the March 1983 double dissolution poll), with the No. 2 position given to Dr Glen Sheil. Sheil's selection was particularly controversial, given his own record: it will be recalled that he was sacked by then Prime Minister Fraser, just 43 hours after his appointment as Veterans Affairs minister, for making apparently pro-apartheid statements. Sheil's selection also set aside the hopes of former National party north Queensland state member Mrs Vicki Kippin of securing a winnable place on the Senate ticket. The state conference also agreed to a proposal in support of the introduction of sex education at state schools (the Nationals had previously opposed such a position), while the conference itself also discussed a range of policy papers, covering such matters as the Queensland economy, technology policy, and the desirability or otherwise of regular cabinet reshuffles.

The period under review was not a happy one for the ALP in Queensland. Despite one opinion poll published in July indicating that the ALP's level of support, if maintained, left it poised to win government at the next state election, the party went on to lose one of its own seats in the Stafford by-election. That particular event was followed by the decision in August of state ALP leader Keith Wright to stand down from that position in order to contest the federal seat of Capricornia. Wright was succeeded in the leadership by Mr Nev Warburton, the member for Sandgate, while former state ALP leader Tom Burns secured the deputy leader's position. Warburton is the sixth ALP leader to face Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen during his term as premier. Both Burns and Warburton are former Electrical Trades Union officials, while the *'Old Guard'* faction within the parliamentary wing managed in general to secure a clean sweep of the ballots for caucus-elected posts determined at that time: Mr Brian Davis was elected as Whip, and Mr Bill Prest as Leader of the House. Nor did that demonstration of authority by the *'Old Guard'* within the parliamentary wing assist the ALP in its ongoing factional struggles in the state. The security of state secretary Peter Beattie and state president Ian McLean in their respective posts was publicly questioned on a number of occasions, while neither individual was publicly seen as capable of hosing-down the various warring factions. Indeed, Beattie's own centre majority faction looked to be self-destructing toward year's end.

### State Parliament

Queensland's Legislative Assembly sat for 29 days spread over 10 sitting weeks, during the latter half of 1984. The major activity of the Parliament during this period was the 1984-85 state budget, which was presented to the Parliament by the premier, Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, on 20 September. The major features of the budget package as announced by the premier were as follows: an increase of 15.7 per cent in education expenditure; a *'special'* additional injection of \$600 million in the capital works program (creating, in the premier's words, *'12,000 man years of additional employment directly and about 40,000 man years of employment totally'*); no increases in state taxes and charges; the employment of 1155 additional teachers, 100 police and 461 hospital and nursing staff; a raising of the payroll tax exemption from \$252,000 to

\$270,000; and a range of other initiatives ranging from funds covering such matters as a liver transplant unit, a series of water resource projects, \$80 million for new state government office blocks, and \$100 million in roadworks (over a three-year period) associated with Gateway Bridge development.

A significant portion of the public debate surrounding the 1984-85 budget was devoted to arguments concerning the premier's continued claims that the state budget was 'balanced', and that the budget contained no increases in state taxes and charges. For example, in July the premier claimed that at the end of his first year as treasurer the government found itself with a surplus in the consolidated revenue fund of \$860,000 (*Courier-Mail*, 10 July 1984), while in his budget speech on 20 September he estimated that at the end of the 1984-85 financial year his government could find itself with a deficit of just \$149,657 (Queensland Budget Papers 1984-85). During the lead-up to the budget, as well as during the budget debate itself, the premier's claims were subject to some scrutiny, the more so in light of figures released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics revealing that in 1983-84 Queensland's state government and semi-government authorities had overspent their income by more than \$1.74 billion, and that the state government faced interest repayments which, on a per capita basis, were much heavier than those applying to most other states. The premier's assertions that the budget contained no new taxes or charges were also challenged, given that the state government over recent years has installed via the Financial Administration and Audit Act a system of automatic adjustments (in line with economic movements) for such changes, thus removing them from the formal budget process.

The 1984-85 budget papers also revealed that about half of Queensland's funds are commonwealth-derived, while similar estimates calculated by the Commonwealth Grants Commission indicate a somewhat higher proportion than that. Indeed, the calculations of the latter body would suggest that over the next year or so the more populous states are likely to press the federal government to change the basis for calculating grants to the individual states. Such an initiative would likely be resisted in the strongest terms by the Queensland premier, who in 1984-85 was already asserting that Queensland had been deprived of \$21 million in terms of its entitlement under the Medicare scheme.

The Auditor-General's 1983-84 annual report, tabled in Parliament in October, indicated that during that year state cabinet ministers spent a total of \$210,020 on entertainment expenses, and a further \$283,741 on domestic and overseas-related travel. The total figure of \$493,761 represented an increase of some \$30,000 over the previous year. One minister alone, Mr Mike Ahern, was listed as spending \$74,934 on functions, liquor and travel, although he was quick to point out in the Parliament that the Auditor-General's report did not indicate whether Ahern's total also incorporated funds spent by his predecessor, Mr Gunn, before the cabinet reshuffle which followed the 1983 state election. Perhaps the more important point in this entire matter, though not one particularly well spotlighted during Parliament's debate on the Auditor-General's report, is that a significant proportion of real ministerial expenditures are actually hidden in departmental accounts, and that some ministers take more care than others in assigning their expenditures ministerially or departmentally.

### Cabinet and the Executive

In mid-October state cabinet decided to place all its classified newspaper advertising in Queensland in the Rupert Murdoch-owned *Daily Sun* and *Sunday Sun*. The move, which followed an earlier cabinet decision to co-ordinate the purchase of all advertising space by government departments and authorities, was justified on commercial grounds by the state government. At the same time, there were some suggestions that the decision was not totally unrelated to apparent hostility within the state government toward selected journalists associated with Queensland Newspapers Pty Ltd, publishers of the *Courier-Mail* and *Sunday Mail*. The government rejected that view. It is also pertinent to point out that the National party's former executive director, Mr Mike Evans, is retained by the Murdoch group as a market research consultant. Under the new arrangement, which took effect on 1 November, all classified advertising in Brisbane would be given exclusively to the Murdoch newspapers, while that stable also would carry 50 per cent of the state government's display advertising. The other 50 per cent is placed according to individual department requirements, which does allow some opportunity for advertising in the *Courier-Mail* and *Sunday-Mail*. The cabinet edict in relation to advertising also applies to all authorities and bodies constituted by legislation of the Queensland Parliament; it thus applies to bodies such as the state's three universities, as well as to grammar schools (the latter, incidentally, managed subsequently to secure an exemption from the ruling; the universities have not been similarly successful). The advertising move in Queensland parallels a similar earlier initiative in New South Wales; in both cases, too, the beneficiaries of the altered policy were newspapers of the Murdoch group.

State cabinet agreed in late November to establish an inquiry into Brisbane gaol. That inquiry, to be headed by former Public Service Board chairman and state ombudsman, Sir David Longland, follows a long series of allegations of corruption, inefficiency and faction-fighting within the state's prisons system. Yet the enquiry as established by cabinet may not have as wide a brief as perhaps is necessary, given the matters under investigation. For example, the enquiry will be conducted in camera, while prisoners will not be allowed to give evidence, and will not be given the protection of anonymity if they do submit material. The enquiry also has no power to subpoena witnesses.

Cabinet made several significant recommendations in respect of appointments during the period under

review. In October cabinet recommended that the Chief Justice of Queensland, Sir Walter Campbell, would succeed Sir James Ramsay as state governor, although the date of his taking up of the appointment remains unclear. Cabinet decided in early December to appoint former Cairns mayor and Cairns Port Authority chairman, Mick Borzi, as first head of the state government's trade office in Bahrain; that office itself opened with Borzi's arrival in Bahrain later that month. In another move, the state government in December also appointed one of the state's leading criminal barristers, Mr Des Sturgess, to the newly created position of Director of Public Prosecutions. One of the first tasks facing Mr Sturgess in his new position was to give the state government advice in terms of the handling of the so-called '*child pornography*' racket.

The Queensland government was involved in a spate of industrial relations disputes during the period under review. In July the state government threatened the Australian Workers Union with deregistration following the latter's actions in respect of the on-going 38-hour week dispute (involving AWU workers employed in the state's 134 local authorities). The premier also threatened to publish the names of senior unionists involved in that dispute. During August state cabinet considered means of negating the effect of a State Industrial Commission decision giving preference to union members in public service employment, and thus effectively supporting compulsory unionism. A wave of industrial disputes occurred in Queensland's power industry in September and October. The state was subject to power-rationing on separate occasions in both months as a result of, first, State Electricity Commission intervention in a State Industrial Commission hearing, and second, a demarcation dispute involving different power industry unions. Electrical Trades Union members, employed at the Tarong power station (located, significantly, adjacent to the premier's own Kingaroy-based electorate of Barambah), also went on strike for an 11-week period over conditions in a new award. Members of the various rail unions also went on strike in October over a dispute involving 2-man crews. One other important dispute, this one involving the Brisbane City Council rather than the state government, involved garbage contractors. This same dispute has been a continuing one over a lengthy period.

#### Issues

The federal government in September chose not to become involved in a potential dispute with the Queensland government and the Douglas Shire Council over the construction of a 32-km road linking Cape Tribulation and Bloomfield. The decision of the federal government was taken despite the agitations of the conservation movement, and the recommendation of the Australian Heritage Commission to the federal government to nominate the Daintree rainforest area for the World Heritage list. Another potential environmental issue, that of the state government's decision to build a bridge linking Stradbroke Island with the mainland, was significantly defused when the Australian Workers Union decided not to oppose construction of the bridge.

A number of other issues flared. Concerned about the condition of the Queensland racing industry was fanned by the Fine Cotton ring-in affair, as well as by the continuing feud between Racing Minister Russ Hinze and TAB chairman and National party stalwart, Sir Edward Lyons, while public attention focused upon the nature and extent of the alleged drug industry in the state following the Costigan findings, and the fracas surrounding the forced transfer of Detective Sergeant Ross Dickson from Mareeba to Townsville. A child pornography racket was exposed in Brisbane, while two National party members of state Parliament (one a minister) were subject to serious allegations concerning their personal behaviour. In November National party backbencher and member for Toowong, Earle Bailey, acknowledged in Parliament that he had been involved in a tax minimization venture involving film-making and distribution, while for several months Water Resources and Maritime Services minister John Goleby was subjected to close questioning about alleged land dealings.

P.C.