

those polled (compared to the Liberals on twenty and the Nationals on twelve) (*Courier-Mail*, 15 February 1992).

Parliament was recalled for a special one-day sitting on 7 February. This sitting was necessary (according to the government) in order to direct the Criminal Justice Commission to reveal the names of those alleged to have misused funds. At this sitting the CJC's seventy-eight page report was tabled citing the categories of abuse (or in some cases insufficient information) and listing the names of the fifty-four members of the previous Parliament who may have abused their entitlements. The CJC had investigated travel claims by members to the tune of \$411,859 over 225 journeys. In the parliamentary discussion it soon became clear that some members were caught up in a culture of claiming expenses when all that was required was their own signature on a form to claim that their trip was on parliamentary business (a system once described by the former Auditor-General as providing "free holiday perks"). Moreover, because there was no definition of "parliamentary business", the CJC stated that it could not say definitively which members had actually misused their expense allowances. The CJC added that simply because a person had been investigated "should not lead to any adverse inference being drawn against that person" (*Courier-Mail*, 8 February 1992). Thus, they concluded that no member would face criminal or civil charges as a result of the report. This was despite the Chair of the CJC, Max Bingham, earlier claiming that about thirty members had misused funds, while presenting a list of unnamed but detailed examples in the CJC's report to Parliament.

The government's embarrassment was eased when the former Liberal Deputy Premier, Llew Edwards, made a public statement to the effect that he had personally approved the use of funds to allow parliamentarians to attend parliamentary bowls competitions (although no written record of this decision was found — and the former Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen remembered that he had expressly forbidden such allowances in 1979). Before the special sitting of Parliament, seven MLAs took the decision to repay money it was alleged they had misused (including Cooper, Mackenroth, McElligott, Alison and Campbell). But subsequent to the sitting day no further MLAs repaid travel claims (even the ones that were most dubious) once it became apparent that definitions of misuse were vague and that no

QUEENSLAND

Riding Out the Storm

The Goss government entered 1992 still embroiled in the MP "travel rorts" affair. The affair was gruelling for the government because many of its current members were implicated, including some of its most important ministers. However, opinion poll findings did not indicate that the affair was electorally damaging. The Premier's approval rating remained high on sixty-four per cent, while the Labor government retained the support of forty-six per cent of

prosecutions would be launched against any of the members named.

For all its intensity and heat, the "travel rorts" affair ended inconclusively. The government came out of the episode somewhat bruised and battered, having lost both two ministers and the moral high-ground on accountability. The Liberal leader, Joan Sheldon, who had done much to keep the issue alive, described the affair as "an extraordinary saga of cover-up, deceit and political cowardice" (*Courier-Mail*, 8 February 1992). Meanwhile the Nationals lost one leader, Russell Cooper, and their new leader Rob Borbidge was also accused in the travel rorts report of having insufficient evidence for some of his own trips and questioned over trips to some of Queensland's tropical islands. Indeed, after the list of names was released, the cross-party composition of the list effectively ended the political point-scoring on the issue.

The Mackenroth-Newnham Row

In a somewhat bizarre twist, the previous Minister of Police, Terry Mackenroth, and the Police Commissioner, Noel Newnham, became involved in a separate scandal over whether the Police Commissioner had abused his own travel claims. The incident arose from a petulant letter written by Mackenroth at the time of his resignation accusing the Commissioner of neglecting to monitor his own behaviour in relation to travel spending. At first the affair looked like a political blunder, but subsequently it appeared more of an attempt to take the Commissioner out and prevent any chance of reappointment. In retrospect, the affair had all the characteristics of a serious poker game played for high stakes. Later when Mackenroth was reinstated to the front bench in September 1992 and Newnham had withdrawn his application for another term, it was clear that the minister had won — mainly because under Westminster conventions ministers set the rules of the game and at the end of the day have the whip hand.

Accused of misappropriating funds (failing to repay an airfare to Canada), Newnham was forced to stand aside while a CJC investigation was conducted into his case. The findings suggested that Newnham had been lax and had not instituted effective procedures or proper internal controls. The case was referred to the Misconduct Tribunal under Mr Richard Chesterton. After the Misconduct Tribunal ordered his sacking, Newnham appealed to the Supreme Court, where the CJC "ran dead" and

did not oppose moves to have the Commissioner reinstated. The Supreme Court found that Mr Chesterton QC had made a legal error in reaching his findings, and therefore set aside the earlier decision. The Supreme Court did not disagree with the Tribunal's findings that Newnham was guilty of the charge of official misconduct. The CJC met subsequently and decided in the "public interest" not to oppose an application from Newnham to dismiss the charge (despite the CJC's own legal opinion to the contrary). Newnham was reinstated in June, but the controversy continued within the legal profession and between members of the parliamentary committee responsible for the CJC. Upon reinstatement Newnham wrote to the minister formally requesting a renewal of his employment contract, but by this stage Newnham had created many enemies and had shown repeated lack of astuteness in his management style and relations with the media.

"Kept in the Dark"

On 22 February the government held a referendum on daylight saving. This issue had been controversial since the Ahern government introduced summertime for a trial period in the summer of 1989-90. The Goss government had maintained the trial and were formally committed to extending daylight saving beyond the trial. However, the government began to feel increasing pressure from those outside the southeast corner of the state and to avoid a political backflip decided on a referendum to resolve the issue once and for all. Although each of the political leaders supported the retention of daylight saving, other senior ministers opposed the idea (including Tom Burns and Keith DeLacy) as well as the majority of the National Party. Despite polls showing public support for the continuation of daylight saving, the referendum resulted in a resounding no vote with around fifty-five per cent against and forty-five per cent for. No electorate outside the southeast corner voted in favour of summertime. However, a certain amount of apathy together with severe floods in the far north, resulted in around 200,000 people on the roll not voting (or around one-ninth of the electorate). The referendum was an expensive business (costing the state around \$5 million) but the eventual resolution got the government off the hook and effectively de-politicised the summertime issue.

Administrative Developments

During early 1992 the government's attention was fixed firmly on the upcoming election. A number of administrative and policy decisions reflected this concern. In April the government announced formally that it would not be legalising prostitution (contrary to the specific recommendations of the CJC's report on the topic). On another front, the government declared that it was not interested in privatisation but would institute an extensive regime of corporatisation affecting many government-owned enterprises. In April a white paper was released outlining the principles of corporatisation (enterprises would remain government controlled but operate with commercial autonomy in the name of efficiency). In a further bid to stimulate the tourism industry the government announced its intention to take a \$7 million stake in Southern Cross Airlines/Compass as part of a shareholder consortium concerned to see the third airline airborne again. But the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Racing, Bob Gibbs, also announced the government's intention to introduce a Great Barrier Reef visitor tax (of \$1 per head) effective from 1993, well after the state election.

In May 1992 the Electoral and Administrative Review Commission released a significant report on the review of codes of conduct for public officials. The report included both appointed officers (public servants and other government employees) and elected officials in state and local authorities. The report recommended that much stricter guidelines should be introduced to help restore public confidence and change many of the unethical practices found in the public sector. In Queensland a philosophy had arisen where some believed that they could use public office to enhance their private interests. The report recommended that codes of conduct should be introduced, that strict monitoring and new procedures should be adopted to prevent conflicts of interest (including among elected officials and items of business brought before the state government or local councils). The report also recommended the establishment of an Office of Public Sector Ethics.

Other issues did not necessarily go well for the government. In February a Commonwealth-State report found that the withdrawal of government services from country towns under the government's regionalisation policy was "killing off" the local centres. Government rationalisations often impacted severely on rural towns. Repeated Opposition attacks were also

made on the number of "mexican bureaucrats" in the state public service (non-Queenslanders appointed to positions, which up to mid-1992 were not statistically large by any measure). In June this parochialism led the Opposition leader to challenge the Premier to provide Parliament with a list of names of all "mexicans" appointed by the government. When the Premier refused, Borbidge declared that a cover up was underway. Other reports criticised the number of Masons still holding senior positions in departments under the Labor government. And, in other policy areas the government was accused of not fulfilling its electoral commitments especially to provide funds. For instance, the arts community accused the government of shortchanging it by some \$1.4 million, even though the Premier later denied this. He claimed that funds had risen in many areas of art, including regional support.

State Economic Development Policy

In early 1992 the government recognised the need for a coherent paper outlining a framework for policy drawing together the government's approach toward state economic development. The resulting document, *Queensland—Leading State*, was released in April 1992 by the Premier, Wayne Goss. In launching *Leading State*, the Premier described it as a "blueprint" for the future development of the Queensland economy. The document articulated three approaches to economic development. First, it noted the limits on state government influence over regional state economies and warned of exaggerating what can be achieved by states. Second, chapters 3 and 4 advanced a general philosophy captured in the term "market enhancement", which was both pro-business and non-interventionist. Finally the document rehearsed a number of sectoral examples of government intervention "beyond market enhancement measures" while presenting the government's adopted criteria for industry assistance. The survey of proposed interventions included all significant industry sectors and provided recognition for the initiatives of the main industry-oriented state government departments. The document suggested that the most fundamental aspect of the government's economic policy was tied to its general management of the state (sound financial management, low taxing, low debt, pro-business attitudes). Within this context, some case-by-case assistance and intervention initiatives could be directed to enhance economic growth.

The reception of *Leading State* was generally favourable among both the business community and the media. However, some political criticism was directed toward the document. The opposition regarded *Leading State* as a “document of deceit”. They also criticised the document for lacking substance and appearing as a “belated effort” to disguise the government’s “failure in economic development”. The Liberals called the document an expensive PR campaign, offering “phantom projects” and directed toward big business rather than the immediate unemployed. But despite these political attacks *Leading State* became an important document reflecting the government’s intentions at the end of their first term.

The Nationals and Liberals

With both non-Labor parties changing leaders during the latter half of 1991, the new leaders spent much of their time trying to restore public confidence and reestablish their party’s credibility. The Liberal’s Joan Sheldon after initial successes over the “travel rorts” affair found it difficult to pull the Liberals together and establish a credible team. Rob Borbidge as leader of the Nationals had similar problems, but was more of a persistent critic of the government performance. Most of the criticisms and questions raised by the conservatives had to be aired over the media as Parliament sat for very few days during 1992, reminding many of the Joh days when Parliament was merely an interruption in the flow of executive government.

Significantly, neither of the conservative parties made any attempt to reforge a coalition despite the impending state election. This inability to construct a political unity kept opinion support for both parties combined well below that of the government. In retrospect, although hostilities and antagonisms still ran high between the two parties, these were wasted months in the leadership tenure of both new leaders.

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