
Queensland

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A One Party State?

By late 2001 the Beattie Labor government was administering Queensland in cruise-control. With a forty-three seat majority in Parliament, a relatively strong ministry and a weak and ineffective opposition, the government was simply increasing its dominance in the first year of its second term. There was much talk of Queensland having become a one-party state (run by Premier Peter Beattie and his deputy and Treasurer Terry Mackenroth — with the AWU still the most dominant faction in the government and party caucus).

By December 2001 the Premier was basking in an exceedingly high popularity rating of 73 per cent with only 16 per cent dissatisfied with his performance (*Australian*, 29 November 2001). His government was equally polling well with up to 54 per cent of popular support over the latter half of 2001 (Morgan Poll, Sept-October figures). In December Labor attracted 51 per cent support according to both Newspoll and Morgan opinion polls, compared to 23-26 per cent for the Liberals and just 7-9 per cent for the National Party. The major movement in the polls was the return of support to the Liberals who had clawed back some ground since the election of February (when

they received just over 14 per cent of the popular vote). The Nationals, however, continued to languish in single figures with their state-wide popularity never higher than 9 per cent from March to December.

Beattie tried to capitalise on his popularity to propose yet again longer parliamentary terms — the perpetual vice of incumbency (*Courier-Mail*, 3 December 2001). But he admitted in December that he could not translate his personal standing into winning a four-year term for future Queensland parliaments. Although Beattie floated the idea of holding another referendum on the issue to amend the Constitution, the National Party's leader, Mike Horan, torpedoed the suggestion by refusing bi-partisan support. Horan commented that despite Queensland being the only state not to have four-year terms, the existing three-year terms gave "people the chance to change a non-performing government" and were "a strong tool for keeping pressure on an administration" (*Sunday Mail*, 2 December 2001).

An "Otherwise Good Character"

To a certain amount of community disbelief, Queensland's Appeal Court determined in August that the prison sentence given to the child sex offender and former politician, Bill D'Arcy, should be reduced from fourteen years down to ten. According to two judges, President Margaret McMurdo and Richard Chesterman, the reduction in sentence for D'Arcy was warranted because of his age, health and "otherwise good character". Although the court refused to overturn the original paedophile convictions, the reduction of sentence implied that D'Arcy could qualify for parole in five years (were he to admit his crimes and undergo a sex offenders course). The court received over a hundred character references in support of D'Arcy (from former constituents, MPs, priests, and even a jockey) and heard psychiatric evidence that D'Arcy could die within five years (*Courier-Mail*, 24 August 2001). However, the man of "otherwise good character" still faced further charges of sex offences yet to be brought before the court. The Appeal Court's decision was regarded as an astounding one in political circles, especially by many of D'Arcy's former colleagues in the ALP. David Solomon argued that D'Arcy had shown no remorse and that the case for his "good character" was "essentially one-sided" (*Courier Mail*, 25 August 2001). Later press reports revealed that D'Arcy had hired a fellow inmate as "muscle" to protect him in prison, paying the minder around \$250 per week. He was also photographed in prison browns relaxed and enjoying the company of his new minder.

Two State Funerals

To lose two former deputy premiers in the same month might, to paraphrase Oscar Wilde, be regarded as careless, but Queensland lost both Bill Gunn and Sir William Knox in September. Genuine tributes were paid to the former National Deputy Premier, Bill Gunn, who died at the age of 81. Gunn was best remembered for his commitment when he was acting Premier to clean up the state by establishing the Fitzgerald inquiry in 1987 as an independent investigation into police corruption. Given a state funeral, Gunn was praised both by the Premier, who said he was a man of honesty and integrity and "got things done", and the Opposition Leader, who stated he had served with distinction for twenty years and had left Queensland with a "well-respected police service" (*Courier-Mail*, 22 September 2001). Public Works Minister Rob Schwarten said Gunn "changed the course of history in Queensland and left the state a better place" (*Courier Mail*, 28 September 2001). The former Liberal leader, Bill Knox, received somewhat less acclaim but was remembered as a grassroots politician, who had served as a minister in coalition governments for eighteen

consecutive years. Knox had become Deputy Premier to Joh Bjelke-Petersen (1976-78) after Sir Gordon Chalk had resigned, but was soon deposed after mounting dissatisfaction with his leadership erupted. He was sometimes regarded as too weak to stand up to Bjelke-Petersen during the tumultuous 1970s, especially over the Liberals' junior status and electoral redistribution.

“Fee-dom” of Information

Irrked by the backlog of Freedom of Information applications and so-called “fishing expeditions” by media outlets and pressure groups, the Beattie government moved to increase the fees for FOI requests. Initially a fee increase was mooted as a way of cutting down the number of overdue applications (*Courier-Mail*, 21 August 2001). The amount charged (\$31 per application) was regarded as a nominal figure by the government, and in August the Premier announced a review of the FOI laws and the fee structure. An additional charge of \$20 per hour for the amount of administrative work involved in locating or assembling the documents was imposed — implying some bills would exceed \$1000 for a single search. In this context, many allegations were made that the government was merely using the review as a way of curtailing the use of FOI to obtain sensitive documents the government would rather not see in the public domain. Many requested documents were presented to cabinet in order to exempt them from public release. Requests were made, in particular, about the costs of the pedestrian bridge (see below) and over the decisions taken in the construction of the superstadium at Lang Park (costing \$280 million, but including transport infrastructure was believed to run out to \$400 million). Periodically, the government processed documents through cabinet to exempt them from FOI. The Liberal leader Bob Quinn accused the government of a “deliberate attempt to rush documents to cabinet to prevent them from being released” and described the government’s actions as “one of the most disgraceful abuses of power in post-Fitzgerald Queensland” (*Courier-Mail*, 22 August 2001). His counterpart in the Nationals, Mike Horan, claimed Queensland was “entering a new Dark Age” (*Courier-Mail*, 23 October 2001).

In another freedom of information case, the Director General of the Families department, Frank Peach, was cleared by the Criminal Justice Commission of any misconduct over the non-release of documents relating to child welfare matters. Peach was accused of not immediately informing the Family Services Minister, Judy Spence, after he had seen legal advice advising that the department had no grounds on which to refuse media requests for the information. The CJC investigation, triggered by the Opposition leader Mike Horan, did not find Peach had acted in an improper or untimely manner.

Partly as a result of these FOI difficulties, relations between the government and the media soured in 2001, with Premier Beattie claiming that he was being victimised by certain journalists and that there was a vendetta against his government. Beattie particularly identified the *Courier-Mail* newspaper which had been pursuing various lines of inquiry — some of which were likely to embarrass the government. The Opposition did not agree Beattie was being victimised, regarding the Premier’s statements as “just another media ploy” to divert attention from the “basic fundamentals” (*Courier-Mail*, 23 October 2001).

“Smart State” Money

A number of states were vying for the right to have Australia’s first synchrotron (a powerful radiation device for research into new drugs and other materials), before the Victorian government announced in August that they would fund the \$150 million

project privately. Although Queensland missed out, the self-styled “Smart State” received around \$30 million in Commonwealth scientific industry seeding funds to develop bio-technology industries. The funds were to support Queensland’s bid to become a national centre for DNA and viral research, and for semi-conductor testing and research based computer modelling. Almost \$15 million of the science funding was committed to the human genome and body protein project based in Brisbane.

More embarrassing to the government was the scandal that broke out over the funding of the leukemia ward 9D at Royal Brisbane Hospital. After a former employee, Wendy Erglis, complained of bed shortages and under-funding, the Health Minister, Wendy Edmond, read out in parliament a letter from fellow employees which appeared to intimidate the whistleblower. Edmond was accused of bullying the former nurse (who was no longer employed by the department), but the main issue appeared to be that a local management issue had blown up into a ministerial scandal that had not been initially well-handled. Edmond’s judgement then became the major issue, until Beattie made it clear he was standing behind his minister.

The Long and Winding Railway, Concrete Highways and Bypass Tunnels

When in doubt about their survival, politicians seem to commit to large infrastructural projects — often of dubious worth. This certainly appeared the message after it was announced by the federal government that a massive \$10 billion railway would be built to connect Melbourne to Darwin but meandering its way through the Great Dividing ranges in Queensland connecting a string of regional towns such as Toowoomba, Wandoan, Moura, Emerald, Hughenden, and eventually Mt Isa to Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory. In September it was announced that work in Queensland would commence with a bridge and connecting track from Boggabilla in NSW to Carrington in Queensland. As the local gauge was narrower than the standard gauge used for the national track, parts of the Queensland rail system would require widening to accommodate the trains. While rural areas and the Northern Territory had welcomed the project, many still doubted its economic viability.

In November 2001 the State government and Brisbane City Council unveiled Stage I of a massive Inner City Bypass connecting and avoiding a series of major roads to the immediate north of Brisbane. The new concrete-encased bypass extended from Bowen Hills to the Normanby Fiveways and included a 400 metre tunnel under the RNA Showgrounds and two smaller ones built to avoid congestion. The five kilometre bypass was expected to cost \$235 million and would reduce cross-city travelling to around three to four minutes (cutting about fifteen minutes from the trip). A tunnel alongside the historic Breakfast Creek Hotel connecting the airport route (Kingsford Smith Drive) would complete the project. Further bypasses were also announced later in the year, such as the \$157 million bypass at Tugun on the Gold Coast – but this project was dogged by rumours that it would be funded by motorist tolls. Many transport planners were critical of these bypasses claiming that they would not reduce congestion in the longer term. And, despite the tonnes of concrete poured out to improve traffic flows, the council and state government were still unable to agree on an integrated ticketing system (or timetabling) for public transport users, prompting many critics to urge a new south-east transit authority be established with responsibility for running the buses, rail and ferries in the greater Brisbane area.

Ansett’s Collapse — Deserving a “Kick in the Bum”

Queensland was particularly affected by the staged collapse of Ansett from September 2001 onward. Many remote services in Queensland were supplied by Ansett or its

subsidiaries with a \$3 million subsidy each year paid by the state government. While the Brisbane-based Virgin Blue airline was expanding, Ansett came under increased commercial pressure as airfares declined to unsustainable levels in a competitive war. When Ansett sacked 16,000 workers in September, Premier Beattie called for a boycott of Air New Zealand (the parent company), saying they needed a “kick in the bum” for running Ansett down. He also suggested Air New Zealand should be banned from Australian airspace until it paid all severance entitlements due to staff. He promised to allocate the \$3 million subsidy to any other company that could service regional Queensland successfully. As an interim measure, Beattie provided \$110,000 per week to allow Flight West to operate until a buyer for the airline was found.

Bread and Circuses

The final Goodwill Games (established by Ted Turner from the US’s CNN corporation) was held in Brisbane over the period 29 August to 9 September. Although the prize money for the events was high, a number of elite athletes pulled out of the games. Some of the events looked staged or were marred by lack of entrants, scratchings or non-shows. And while ticket sales were sluggish (and with only a week to go around 150,000 or the 350,000 tickets remained unsold), most were eventually sold and the games were generally regarded as a success. Initially the government (which had underwritten the event) was relieved at the success of the ticket sales, and even predicted that the games would break even or turn a small profit. But final figures indicated the state government still had to subsidise the event by \$4 million (*Courier-Mail*, 1 December 2001). Beattie considered this a “fantastic result”, and argued that the “unprecedented” television coverage to an estimated one billion viewers worldwide was the major benefit of the games.

The on-again, off-again Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) was due to be held in Brisbane between 6 and 9 October. After Brisbane was announced as the venue, around forty protest groups began planning mass street demonstrations (some hoping to “Stop CHOGM” from meeting in a repeat of the Seattle demonstrations or the M1 protests against global finance). The evolving topics that attracted protest tended to have little to do with the CHOGM group — including the anti-corporation “no-labels” campaign, anti-globalisation, abolishing Third World debt, anti-Zimbabwean President Mugabe’s regime and supposed homophobia, Tamil liberation, Amnesty International, then opposition to US President Bush’s war against terrorism, opposition to marsupial meat being served to CHOGM delegates, and finally lack of consultation over the signs CHOGM organisers erected to promote the event. The state government began a process of planning to manage the expected protests — so that they would not become violent or disrupt the rights of the assembled government leaders to meet and discuss their agendas. With up to 5000 delegates expected to converge on the Convention Centre on Southbank and with most dignitaries accommodated in a number of five-star hotels across the river in the CBD, the security arrangements were a logistical nightmare. Up to 500 separate cavalcades were anticipated and a series of road restrictions and closures were announced (to the ire of city administrators). Police and Premier’s Department liaison officers met with protesters and four independent mediators were appointed to assist in resolving disputes between police and protesters. Despite the meticulous planning, there was much speculation about whether the event would go ahead after the September the eleventh terrorist attack on the New York World Trade Centre by the al-Qaeda network. When the British Prime Minister Tony Blair confirmed he would not attend because of the international situation (and the pending invasion of Afghanistan by the

US-led forces), the Queen also announced she would not attend and the event was suspended in late September until March the following year. Later it was announced that the rescheduled CHOGM would not be held in Brisbane but be moved to Coolum (largely for security reasons). This led to claims for compensation from representatives of Brisbane's hotels and restaurants — who now felt twice hit, once by the cancellation and then by the relocation.

Labor's Internal Realignments

The fragmented left factions of the ALP announced that they were remerging in October to form the Queensland Labor Left (QLL). After seven years divided by personalities and union allegiances, the left's merger signalled a lessening of the conflicts that had arguably reduced their power inside the party at the expense of the AWU faction. Indeed, senior left sources claimed that the unification was "brokered because of anger over the role of the AWU faction in electoral roting" (*Courier-Mail*, 2 October 2001). With Bob Gibbs having departed the scene and other protagonists having moved on, the combined QLL gave their senior ministers more clout in caucus. The positions of both Education Minister Anna Bligh and Transport Minister Steve Bredhauer were enhanced by the remerger, but Families Minister Judy Spence departed the left to join Terry Mackenroth's Labor Unity (Old Guard) faction. Although the realignment did not attract much wider attention, the Nationals' leader believed that an enhanced left would push through radical social policies in the government — but scant evidence of this surfaced in the immediate aftermath.

Further Tribulations Among the 'Minor Parties'

In the lead-up to the federal election the Queensland Liberals were embroiled in an internal controversy over the evasion of GST by local branches. Allegations were made by branch party members that illegal GST reimbursements (input credits) were being made by the party (*Courier-Mail*, 24 August 2001). One branch treasurer at Toowoomba, Margaret Watts, accused the party hierarchy of "cheating on the government". Liberal party officials admitted the scam but claimed that the Queensland division had merely "misinterpreted" the provisions of the GST credit rules. The tax dodge was raised in federal parliament but was swamped by the *Tampa* crisis in September.

Further branch warfare also broke out before the federal election over allegations of ethnic branch-stacking in the federal seat of Ryan. One of the leading contenders for the normally safe Liberal seat, Michael Johnson, had recruited over 100 Chinese members (some of whom were residents overseas) and was accused of branch-stacking by supporters of rival faction boss Bob Tucker (Tucker had stood unsuccessfully in the Ryan by-election in March 2001). When the party's executive had attempted to hold a partial preselection, Tucker commenced legal action to force a full preselection ballot (in which he was successful). Despite claims of vote-fixing and late enrolments, Johnson was successful in a three-way split of the vote for Ryan, defeating Bob Tucker and Ian Runge by 247 votes to 136 and 50 respectively. Earlier Matthew Boland had indicated his intention to stand but had withdrawn in favour of Johnson.

In August and September the parliamentary leader of the Liberals, Bob Quinn (who had begun to impress many with his feisty performances in parliament) announced he intended not to allow defeated former Liberal MPs to be preselected for their old seats. He claimed the party needed to rejuvenate itself with new candidates and ought to dispense with people with too much baggage (*Courier-Mail*, 30 August 2001). Six defeated Liberal MPs were affected including the factional heavyweight Santo Santoro

who had lost his seat of Clayfield. However, Santoro simultaneously announced his intention to recontest his former seat, pointing out that Quinn did not have the authority to decide who ought to be preselected. Quinn also announced that he was working on a two-term strategy for getting back into government by 2007, but this meant that the conservatives had to perform well at the 2004 election giving themselves the chance of winning the following election (*Courier-Mail*, 6 September 2001). Quinn was apparently ambivalent about the prospect of re-forming the coalition, issuing some non-negotiable principles (such as placing One Nation last on how-to-vote-cards) in November, but also hoping to recapture some former National electorates (and preselecting Liberals to contest once-held National territory).

The leader of the Liberal opposition in the Brisbane City Council, councillor Michael Caltabiano, resigned in August after his fellow councillors deposed him from the state executive committee of the party. His removal or “dumping” was a consequence of factional power-plays at the state-level, especially the Bob Tucker-led MPs and councillors against the Bob Carroll-Santo Santoro led faction that had substantial control over the organisational wing of the party. Caltabiano felt his position as leader in the council was untenable. His resignation (which he symbolised by then not sitting with the other Liberals in council) exposed to the public once again the internal and viperous machinations of the party. These tensions made it all the more difficult for the party’s president, Senator John Herron, to pull the contending factions together.

Peter Wellington, one of the parliamentary Independents who enabled a minority Beattie Labor government to form in July 1998, was critically injured in a bulldozer accident on his Sunshine Coast property in July. The MP lay trapped under his machine for several hours and suffered injuries to his back, head and almost lost his legs. He spent around five weeks in hospital before being released in a wheelchair in late August. He resumed his parliamentary duties and later commenced walking with the aid of leg braces.

In October Pauline Hanson began her court appearances for fraudulently registering her party (and then receiving electoral funds). Appearing with fellow accused David Ettridge, she was charged with illegally obtaining \$500,000 from the Electoral Commission (which she had had to repay before the previous state election). The strain of her court ordeal eventually forced her to retire (perhaps temporarily) from active political involvement in One Nation after the federal election of 10 November.

Finally, pressure began mounting on the performance of the Nationals’ leader, Mike Horan, especially over his apparent inability to match it with the Premier. Although currents of dissatisfaction began to appear over the latter half of 2001 these did not become overly public until March 2002. Horan’s low standing in the polls did little to quell the feeling of disquiet. His most likely challenger, Lawrence Springborg, began to open up new directions announcing he was strongly in favour of a complete amalgamation of the two conservative parties (an idea which seemed rational to everyone except the two organisations concerned).

“Dying for the ‘Right to Drink’” in Remote Aboriginal Communities

With this by-line, the *Courier-Mail*’s Tony Koch summed up the essence of the government’s report into the appalling conditions reported in indigenous communities (*Courier-Mail*, 20 November 2001). The former chief of the Court of Appeal, Tony Fitzgerald, making a habit of writing reports for the government (having done earlier ones on police corruption and Fraser Island), presented a stark picture of life in Aboriginal communities on Cape York. Levels of abuse of indigenous women were

104 per cent higher than the rate reported in the wider community. Cape York communities drank up to four times the national average in alcohol consumption and many babies were born with foetal alcohol syndrome. The Arukun community canteen made \$2.5 million per year mostly from alcohol sales alone. Fitzgerald (who was commissioned in July and reported in November) argued that the situation in the communities was “so serious” that a “prohibition on the supply and consumption of alcohol” should be considered unless significant improvement was made over the next few years. He urged the prohibition of community-run canteens, arguing that they had become irresponsible and interested in selling large quantities of alcohol as a way of generating profits or providing funds to run services. He also suggested that authorities impose a serious clamp-down on “sly grogging” (the illegal supplying of alcohol to communities) which was rampant in some communities. Addressing the high levels of violence, Fitzgerald advocated the establishment of community safe houses for women and children. He was also critical of the lack of coordination among government agencies in providing services to indigenous communities. The Premier promised to “bite the bullet” on alcohol and committed to vigorously pursue a whole of government approach to improving the situation on the ground. The Premier’s Department was given responsibility for coordinating the various policy responses.

Other Little Things

Brisbane university student Nigel Freemarijuana was allowed to retain his name (changed by deed poll in 1996) on the Queensland electoral roll despite the Australian Electoral Commission attempting to enrol him under his birth name of Nigel Quinlan. The Commission was attempting to implement Commonwealth legislation that banned frivolous or political marketing names (parliamentarians had been concerned some candidates were circumventing party identification rules by changing their names by deed poll to indicate their party or policy stance on ballot papers). The Australian Administrative Appeals tribunal ruled in November that Freemarijuana was entitled to register under his existing legal name, prompting the drug reform activist to claim the decision had “renewed his faith in democracy” (*Courier-Mail*, 8 November 2001).

Local councillors won a minor reprieve when the Court of Appeal rejected the state government’s legislation barring serving councillors for contesting federal elections while remaining in office. The court found that the state government did not have the constitutional right to impose such a ban. However, councillors were still banned from remaining in office if they chose to stand for state elections.

The long-awaited pedestrian bridge across the Brisbane River linking the city with Southbank was finally completed. The project, which had initially been costed at \$13 million, had blown out to double that figure (first to \$23 million then \$35 million). The bridge had been delayed in construction due to a series of miscalculations and accidents (such as insufficient room to float the steel arch up river under the Story and Captain Cook bridges and a floating crane that fell over into the river). The state’s Information Commissioner, the Opposition and sections of the media all tried to secure documents explaining the cost increases but the government chose to keep them secret. To distract attention from the mishaps, the Premier announced a competition to name the Bridge and in the process received many humorous suggestions from the public (including: the Coathanger, the Bridge over the River Why, the Bridge to Nowhere, Beattie’s Bridge or Beattie’s Folly, and even Jim’s Leap — presumably referring to the Lord Mayor Jim Soorley). Also mooted as possible names were the federation bridge or the republican bridge. Eventually a more prosaic name for the bridge was

announced — the Goodwill Bridge after the final Goodwill Games hosted by Brisbane in 2001.

To drive home the message that the Beattie government was out to build the “Smart State”, the Premier launched new car number plates with the inscription “Queensland — the Smart State” in maroon letters. Initially the slogan was to be embossed on all new number plates and made compulsory, but after protests from tourism operators and the public the Premier rescinded his decision and allowed motorists instead to select which slogan they preferred — opting either for the new one or the traditional “Sunshine State”. Then, as if to raise a few ghosts of the past, full-page colour advertisements promoting “Smart State” began to appear in the local press. Looking suspiciously like updates of the promotions run much earlier by the Nationals (such as “Queensland Unlimited”), Labor’s ads announced “Things are Happening Here” and provided lists of “smart companies” investing in Queensland. Funded by taxpayers, the somewhat political advertisements boasted of: “smart businesses — moving to the Smart State” (*Courier-Mail*, 22 December 2001). Later ads also contained colour photographs of the Premier. How history repeats itself...
