

The Queensland Election of 2004: The art of ‘non-campaigning’

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The 2004 state election in Queensland makes a fascinating study of electoral politics — not because of the eventual outcome (an expected victory for the Labor government headed by Premier Peter Beattie) but for the way the result was achieved. The 2004 election campaign broke the conventional rules of modern party campaigning. It was a campaign of structured under-achievement, of deliberate down-playing and minimalist engagement. Public interest in the campaign never lifted above rock bottom. The main protagonists, sensing that voters might punish anyone talking ‘serious policy’ or ‘hard-nosed politics’ consciously toned down their performance and restricted their exposure. At the state level, they consciously tried not to disseminate policy, inform the electorate, push propaganda, or launch into adversarial commentaries on their opponents. Queensland may have pioneered the art of ‘non-campaigning’ as an alternative model to the more recent media-driven techniques of campaigning.

Queensland’s 2004 election was a ‘non-campaign’ but not because the campaign was uninteresting, did not excite voters, turned off the media or bored many of the key protagonists. Rather, it was a ‘non-campaign’ because the main political actors chose this strategy as a way of avoiding campaigning — at least in the state-wide context and at the leadership level. The term ‘non-campaigning’ is used here to denote intentional inactivity during the formal campaign period, to avoid the usual generation of interest in issues, to reduce the risk of inciting a protest vote, and to obviate the need to outline extensive election commitments. ‘Non-campaigning’, we argue, was a deliberate decision not to campaign in the lead-up to the election, and interestingly all the major political parties complied with this strategy for their own different reasons.

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The option for a subdued campaign was certainly a strong preference for Premier Peter Beattie as the incumbent holding around three-quarters of the seats in parliament (66 of the 89 seats). The tactic advantaged Beattie by focusing little attention on his government and on his near-record majority.¹ It allowed Labor to maintain the realistic objective not only of winning government (something never in doubt) but also of winning back the same number of seats with which it went into the election. Non-campaigning was a strategy aimed at pulling off a repeat landslide — a rare event in Australian politics at either the federal or state levels.

More difficult to explain is why the two opposition parties led by Lawrence Springborg (Nationals) and Bob Quinn (Liberals) followed suit. Yet, the opposition complied with or were coopted into this approach — meaning there was no adversarial engagement between the two sides of politics. Both coalition parties entered this election with low representation in parliament and low morale among their party faithful. They were expecting and hoping for a ‘natural correction’ and a return to something more like their usual vote, and a quiet campaign (avoiding drawing attention to their weaknesses) seemed perhaps to their leadership most likely to deliver this outcome. They were confronting a popular premier who was an accomplished campaigner of the past and who normally revelled in media attention.² The fact that the opposition similarly chose not to actively campaign provided a necessary precondition for the ‘non-campaign’ to prevail. Non-campaigning requires both sides or both protagonists to make the decision not to campaign — for if either does not go along with this strategy then a more conventional promotional campaign would develop.

The two most memorable impressions of the non-campaign was an unattractive photo of Peter Beattie stretched out on a deckchair in his rugby shirt sleeping off the heat in the tropics (hardly the shot of a man trying), and a similarly domestic but intimate photo of Springborg naked chest while he ironed his own shirt in a hotel room (*Courier-Mail* 26.1.2004). The only time any ire was raised in the election was when a female journalist questioned why, in contrast to Heather Beattie, Springborg’s wife was not dutifully following him around the hustings — an intervention that caused both Springborg and Beattie to leap chivalrously to Linda

¹ Both Forgan Smith in 1935 and Joh Bjelke-Petersen in 1974 held larger majorities in a smaller Assembly. Forgan Smith held 46 of 62 seats (74.2 per cent), Bjelke-Petersen held 69 of 82 seats (84.2 per cent), while Beattie in 2001 captured 66 of 89 seats (74.2 per cent). Both these former premiers had captured far more of the popular vote in gaining these earlier landslides with Smith winning 53.4 per cent in 1935, Bjelke-Petersen 58.9 per cent in 1974 compared to Beattie’s 48.9 per cent in 2001.

² Beattie had played the 2001 campaign as a series of stunts — famously swimming with sharks, riding the Dreamworld roller-coaster and performing for the media at every opportunity (see Wanna and Arklay 2001). Springborg began the election campaign attempting to out-stunt the Premier — jogging on every main street, cycling in mud, and baring almost all for the cameras. Beattie did not really engage in the stunts competition — and from the start said he was over the need for pulling stunts.

Springborg's defence while pouring scorn on the journalist for her underhand attack (*Courier-Mail* 29.1.2004: 17).³

The Characteristics of Beattie's 'Non-campaign'

Beattie's decision to seek re-election by not campaigning turns on its head the adage that 'campaigns are important' (Holbrook 1996:2) and that campaigns are an integrative and competitive part of democratic free elections (Denver 1996: 413–4). If this campaign mattered then it mattered in the inverse sense — virtually nothing in the weeks before the poll was allowed to disturb the *status quo* and prevailing electoral mood. It appeared designed to lull the electorate into a 'business as usual' frame of mind.

Traditional theories of electoral campaigning present the campaign as a vital part of the political process — with political adversaries actively engaging with the people, seeking to persuade voters to support them, and hoping to change voting intentions. Normatively, campaigns are intended 'to involve the electorate in the political contest' (McClosky 1972: 261) and contribute 'to our self-development and expression' (Trent and Friedenber (1995: 4). Campaigns are about convincing voters of the worthiness of candidates and leaders, promoting policies, and distilling issues through political conflict. As Jaensch (1995: 2) argued, election campaigns 'offer the citizens a choice — between candidates, between programs and policies, between parties, and between teams to form government'. Almost all the campaigning literature presumes an activist orientation to campaigning. The elements are usually active candidates and participants, policy rivalry, fundraising and campaign spending, media coverage and attempts to win over the media as a political actor, and more recently extensions of campaign activity *via* Internet or the 'fifth estate' (Morris 1999). Arguments within the campaign literature generally centre on the relative importance of personalities versus policies, the value of certain techniques, the merits of positive versus negative advertising, and whether campaigns themselves have any measurable effects on the outcomes (Holbrook 1996).

Queensland's 2004 election is unrecognisable in these terms. The Queensland election was not simply listless, in that it failed to rouse popular interest. Nor was it simply a case of both sides fighting for the 'underdog' status (the deliberate pretence that one's own side will lose, or do much worse than expected).⁴ Nor was

³ Arguably, Heather Beattie's constant presence by her husband's side and the closeness of their relationship was an important aspect of his popularity especially among women voters.

⁴ Beattie occasionally referred to the 'underdog tactic' initially by claiming it was a problem that Labor could not claim underdog status. He was quoted on day one (*Australian* 14.1.2004) as stating 'I am not here saying we're the underdog. We're not. We have the reverse problem. The overwhelming majority of Queenslanders think we're going to win. The problem with that is you can lose'. He also stressed that a series of relatively good opinion poll results for Labor were the 'worst thing that could happen to us' (*Australian* 23.1.2004).

it a campaign of silly distractions and theatre to occupy media attention, as the previous election of 2001 had been to some extent. Rather, in 2004 neither side chose to campaign.

There were various elements to support this non-decision thesis. These are summarised below:

- **Timing and preoccupation:** the premier deliberately called the election during the summer holidays, going as early as he could and with a short election period (26 days); the premier announced the election two weeks before the Australia Day long weekend, with most voters not paying attention to politics, perhaps out of the state or on holiday, or escaping the heat for most of the three weeks. Whereas the practice of calling an election when the electorate was preoccupied with other issues was discouraged, Beattie has now twice shown that incumbents can benefit from going to the polls when voters are preoccupied.
- **Minimal advertising;** a few innocuous television advertisements from both sides (old-fashioned and designed to be understated) and virtually no press advertisements in the major dailies; local candidates ran mail-outs and targeted direct mailing letters were used extensively, and some regional papers were selected for political advertising especially where Labor held marginal seats in formerly conservative territory.
- **Depoliticisation:** a decision was made prior to the announcement of the election not to antagonise voters, not to engage voters, not to be combative, not to entertain a 'hard sell' of policies, not to 'talk politics', not to 'remind people about politics' or the 'problems of the day'. Both sides were cognisant of the post-September 11 mood, which had raised public anxieties but which did not favour politicians reminding them of these negatives. The rhetoric of reassurance was acceptable but not so that it was over-played. Direct mailing was used especially by Labor to target voters in selected seats with specific promises in line with their well-researched preferences (for example, promising an end to tree-felling promoted to inner city professionals in Brisbane).
- **Structured underachievement:** both leaders rationed themselves to one short media engagement per day — then nothing. The intention was to create a media opportunity early in the day, avoid any protests or bad publicity and then sit on it for the rest of the day forcing the electronic media to go with what they had.
- **Leaders' personality:** almost no other political actors were involved in the election other than the premier and opposition leader (no senior ministers or shadow ministers, no other party leaders went public); the election came down to a presentation around two personalities — with Beattie content to rest quietly on his record and Springborg attempting to gain some public recognition. Beattie relied on his friendly and avuncular style but did not perform in a presidential way or appear as a people's champion; he was relaxed, laid back and appeared humble.

- No negative attacks: there was almost entirely an absence of negative campaigning or critical discourse throughout the three weeks, with Springborg vowing not to be negative or run negative ads, and Beattie friendly and apologetic to his counterpart.
- De-emphasising staged events: the public debate between the leaders was intentionally minimised as an event; as before it was relegated to the last day of campaign (to minimise any damage, fall-out or impact); and was so polite the compare was compelled to chastise the two leaders for being 'too nice to each other'.

The reasons for the choice of the 'non-campaign' were principally that Beattie did not wish to appear over-confident, fearing that the universal expectations of a Labor victory could erode his vote. He wished to minimise any potential protest vote that may materialise (as it had against incumbents in 1995 and 1998).⁵ As a local media 'star' he also did not want to risk over-exposure or irritate voters with saturation coverage of himself (hence, no stunts this time). Significantly, by 2004 all main three parties had finally disentangled themselves from the spectre of One Nation by deciding not to allocate preferences (the issue of preferences to One Nation had dominated the state campaigns of 1998 and 2001 to the detriment of the conservatives). Hence, with all three major parties advocating a 'just-vote-1' strategy to their supporters, the 2004 campaign became effectively a first-past-the-post ballot (Wanna 2004). There were no three-cornered contests after a prior agreement between the coalition parties.

So, does the 2004 Queensland election repudiate the normal pattern of campaign techniques and media-centred strategies? Probably not, but we would argue that there are lessons to be learned from the Queensland campaign and some indications that the 'non-campaign' strategy may be adopted by other actors in other jurisdictions. The conditions would have to be suitable, perhaps comparable to those shaping the political contours found in Queensland in 2004. Non-campaigning may be a viable option when governments have large margins and many seats to protect; when the opposition is weak and seeking to lessen attention to its own shortcomings; when the leader is overwhelmingly popular but anxious not to over-do it; when there are no major scandals biting into the government's legitimacy; and when the main poll strategists wish to avoid a sudden protest vote. These conditions could conceivably be applicable to other states and territories, but less so federally.⁶

⁵ Beattie warned of the danger of a protest vote from the outset. Journalists reported he 'stressed his government's vulnerability to a protest vote' when he called the snap election (*Australian* 14.1.2004).

⁶ Indeed, there are some initial similarities between the Queensland campaign and the 2003 NSW campaign in which Labor's Bob Carr conducted a low-key but presidential campaign but managed to spend over \$11 million on advertising. Moreover, the opposition Liberal's John Brogden campaigned actively and credibly even though his message did not resonate.

Spinning a Convenient Ruse for the Poll: For the sake of the children

With a sense of *déjà vu*, Beattie caught many by surprise with his announcement on the 14th January that he had informed the Governor to call the state election for Saturday 7th February 2004, some three months before it was constitutionally necessary.⁷ Just as with the 2001 poll, the date chosen meant most of the campaign would take place during the holiday hiatus, when Queenslanders' minds were more attuned to sun, surf and sand than to issues of state. Although Beattie had been forced in unusual circumstances to go early in 2001 (the loss of three MPs including his deputy premier over electoral rorting — and the risk to his parliamentary majority), in 2004 his decision was taken purely out of opportunism.

Ostensibly, Beattie called the 2004 snap poll to clear the air over the systemic maladministration in the Families Department — which had failed to act over hundreds of cases of child abuse — especially with children in foster care. With cases dating back twenty to thirty years, a culture of cover-up seemed to have developed in the besieged department. Often when the department knew of cases of sexual abuse it felt powerless to act and did not pass the matter on to the police. The Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) conducted an investigation into the Families Department and the system of care. After reviewing 150 submissions and conducting two weeks of public hearings (at which both the minister Judy Spence and the director-general gave evidence), the CMC produced an interim report in January 2004 with 110 recommendations for change. Beattie had publicly stated that his government had 'failed' and that the Families Department 'had failed'. He was at the apogee of apology.

With the Liberal leader on holidays in Sydney and Springborg back on his Yelarbon farm, Beattie announced he needed to call the snap election because he was 'putting the children first' (*Courier-Mail* 21.1.2004:1). But, like the Hawke government's double dissolution election of 1987 (called strictly on the Australia Card but never fought on that issue), the children in foster care issue rarely surfaced again. However, the fact that Beattie had called the election on this issue meant he could not really be accused on diverting attention away from his government's record on families and foster care. His convenient premise for the early election was a smart way to defuse or neutralise a potential damaging issue. But it was also something of a ruse.

⁷ 15 May 2004 was the last possible day for a state election. The 2001 state election was held on 17 February. The Premier had lived up to his promise not to call an early election.

Off before Everyone's Ready

Without fixed terms and fixed election dates,⁸ Queensland premiers are able to call elections when they are of most benefit to the incumbents — an advantage Beattie has exploited to the full. The element of surprise worked to his advantage in a number of ways.⁹ Many seats around the state still had no conservative candidate preselected at the time of the announcement. The eight days allowed for candidates to nominate did not give his opponents much time to organise nor did it allow the fringe parties and renegade independents time to organise their nominations. The period allowed for candidates to nominate closed before many realised the election was on or could do much about it. Indeed, almost one-third or 29 of the 89 electorates had managed only two or three candidates when the close of nominations occurred.¹⁰

The Labor government entered the election from a position of strength, holding a total of 66 seats in the 89-seat unicameral parliament. The National Party, the state's traditionally dominant conservative party, held just 12 seats, while their sometime coalition partners, the Liberal Party had managed at the last poll to retain only three. Of the three sitting Liberals only one, their leader Bob Quinn, was recontesting the 2004 poll. A further six seats were held by locally-popular independents (Peter Wellington, Liz Cunningham, Dolly Pratt, Chris Foley, Lex Bell and Elisa Roberts) with the remnants of One Nation holding onto two seats.¹¹ This unusual composition of the outgoing parliament fed into the way the election developed. One Nation looked a spent force; the Liberals were tired and had lost momentum; the Nationals were hoping for their fortunes to turn-around; while the independents were solely focused on holding their own seats.

Labor, anticipating a win, had been for some months internally preoccupied with the composition of its next post-election ministry. Three senior ministers had announced their retirement in the months before the election but agreed to serve out the term and had not been replaced. These were: Wendy Edmond (Health), Matt Foley (Employment) and Steve Bredhauer (Transport). The lure of promotion wafted through the Labor factions — with only the AWU faction not having a

⁸ Queensland and the Commonwealth are alone in having short parliamentary terms (3 years maximum) and non-fixed dates for the election (leader's discretion). NSW, South Australia, the ACT and now Victoria have all fixed their election dates at 4 yearly intervals; while Tasmania and Western Australia have 4 year non-fixed terms. The non-fixed laggards appear to be a dwindling group.

⁹ A cartoon captured the essence of this surprise when it showed Beattie at an athletics race standing on the winners podium about to start the race with a starters' pistol but with no other competitors yet present (*Courier-Mail* 14.1.2004).

¹⁰ Some interest groups were still talking about running independent 'protest' candidates some 2–3 days after nominations closed. The Labor party had extensively analysed the 2001 campaign and concluded that the unusual timing had actually been to the incumbent government's advantage.

¹¹ One Nation had won three seats in 2001 (Tablelands, Lockyer and Gympie) but Elisa Roberts (Gympie) declared herself independent in April 2002. The two remaining members of One Nation (both elected in 2001) were Rosa Lee Long and Bill Flynn (leader).

vacancy prior to the election. Lists of potential replacements were circulated through the party and with the media immediately after Christmas (*Courier-Mail* 27.12.2003). Each faction (the AWU, Labor Unity/Old Guard and the Queensland Left) seemed to have three to four talented and conscientious candidates for the pending vacancies. Beattie was challenged to name his new ministry (and indicate his chosen replacements) before the election was called but had refused — saying he did not want to take the endorsement of the people for granted.

Fortuitously for Beattie, Labor's main opponents in the south-east of the state, the Liberals were still wracked by factional conflicts and internal litigation. The state director of the party, Brendan Cooper, had resigned two months before Christmas, blaming internecine factionalism and 'lunacy' in the party as the reasons for his departure. His replacement, Geoff Green, was only one day into his new job when the poll was announced. The preselected Liberal candidate for the safe seat of Moggill, Bruce Flegg, faced a bitter legal challenge from the losing candidate Russell Galt. This challenge was defeated and Flegg's candidacy confirmed but only after a barrage of Queen's Counsels' opinions on the legality of the decision were fired by both sides.

Also well before the election was announced, the Nationals had changed leaders — dumping the hapless Mike Horan for the younger and more energetic Lawrence Springborg who promised to adopt a more 'progressive conservative' approach and trumpet the cause of coalition unity. He immediately committed himself to running a clean campaign extenuating the 'positives' and avoiding negative campaigning. While his personal commitment was unquestioned, many commentators wondered whether the National and Liberal party organisations would share the same view when the election was called. In the event Springborg stuck to his promise and refused to engage in any derogatory politicking and the coalition parties eschewed any negative advertisements. The closest they came to critical ads was a play on 'Re-Pete Pete', implying that Beattie style was simply to repeat apologies for problems rather than fix them. They showed a television on the blink showing news-footage of repeated apologies from Beattie ('all your own words' as Springborg later said to Beattie). In a media-savvy era, they looked clunky, old-fashioned and rather amateurish. Similarly, Labor did not attack the Coalition with any vehemence, merely running a few ads with Springborg and various former leaders shown as skittles being knocked over and falling by the wayside.¹² But it was all mild stuff and not very extensive.

Transmitting Reassurance without being Presidential

In a low-key start to the election, Beattie recommitted himself to a pledge made in 1998 to prioritise employment opportunities for Queenslanders, promising a total of

¹² Labor spent more on television advertising in 2004 than in 2001 according to party sources; much of this was directed to those regions and seats where Labor identified it was vulnerable. The party spent more on direct mailing in 2004.

34,000 new jobs over the next three years. His message was immediately overshadowed by the unforeseen ministerial resignation of Tourism Minister Merri Rose after allegations of bullying by several of her ministerial staff and after it was revealed her son had driven her electoral car to Sydney to watch a rugby game. The loss of a fourth minister, one whom Beattie had personally supported through earlier rough spots, was more than a 'minor distraction' which for about a week pushed any campaign news to the background. But Rose was sitting on a solid margin (she did not resign her seat not step down as Labor's candidate for Currumbin) and initially the incident did not appear significant.¹³ Springborg perhaps trapped by his earlier commitment to a clean campaign did not attack Rose and allowed the scandal to pass.¹⁴ But Rose dug herself further in the mire — with swearing, petulant attacks on the media, a dinner with disgraced Labor rorters from 2000-01, and subsequent revelations of falsified diary entries. The Merri Rose saga was a tawdry episode, a two-week capsule of compounded stupidity. But at the same time it allowed the astute Premier the opportunity to claim the underdog mantle somewhat disingenuously. Not content with observing Rose's safe seat of Currumbin was less than assured, Beattie claimed he was now 'worried about the whole 66 seats' (*Courier-Mail* 16.1.2004: 5). Unashamedly, he almost qualified for an Oscar!¹⁵

Although Beattie had waged a presidential campaign in 2001 that focused on his leadership, he was far less flamboyant and omnipresent in 2004. Beattie did not act out his own description of himself as a 'media tart', but instead volunteered 'I've mellowed, I'm now boring and mellow' (*Australian* 14.1.2004). He opted for far less razzamatazz and hid behind the veil of 'Team Beattie' — making his face and name synonymous with Labor but relegating the party label to the minimum. One journalist commented on the style by stating: 'Team Beattie seemed to be preparing to spend much of the 2004 campaign not drawing too much attention to itself, perhaps expecting the conservative parties to repeat past mistakes and lose their composure once the race to February 7 started' (*Courier-Mail* 17.1.2004: 27).

¹³ Currumbin had earlier been considered a Labor marginal until the 2001 state election when Rose retained the seat for Labor and increased her majority to around 15 per cent. See (<http://homepages.ihug.com.au/~pollbludger/qld2004.htm>).

¹⁴ After calling for Rose to resign, Springborg merely quipped 'this is not a terminal problem for the Beattie Labor government. In actual fact it is no more than a mosquito bite on an elephant' (*Courier-Mail* 17.1.2004).

¹⁵ Despite the Premier's mock concern at the possibility of losing, 'Team Beattie' had little to worry about according to frequent opinion polls taken throughout the three-week campaign. Polls in December 2003 put Labor's primary vote at 46 per cent (down marginally from its 2001 figure of 48.9 per cent) to the Coalition's 28.7 per cent (*Australian* 14.1.2004). The *Courier-Mail* (24.1.2004: 10) ran two separate polls showing Labor in front with 38 per cent primary to the coalition's 30 per cent on 15 January and on 42 per cent support to the Coalition's 30 per cent on 23 January. A two party preferred poll conducted in the last days of January placed Labor ahead by 58–42 per cent (*Sunday Mail* 1.2.2004). The Premier also had a groundswell of personal goodwill going into the polls and indeed, throughout 2003 Newspolls had consistently shown Beattie enjoyed a popularity rating of around 65 per cent (*Australian* 4.7.2003). This figure dropped in the election period to 49 per cent as reported by the *Sunday Mail* (1.2.2004).

At times observers could be excused for believing ‘Team Beattie’ consisted of nothing more than the Premier and his wife Heather — as they toured about the state in a leisurely style. They appeared more the ‘odd couple’ of grey nomads chasing the sunspots of northern Queensland. If they were out walking or meeting the locals it was unusual for a minister or back-bencher ever to be in sight. On one occasion when the two of them arrived for a radio interview, the announcer quipped that ‘Team Beattie’ had arrived, much to the disdain of the Premier.

As far as slogans go, the election could not have been more bland. The Premier urged voters to support him and ‘Keep Queensland Moving’ (a rehash of the 2001 campaign theme of ‘heading in the right direction’), while the Coalition simply urged voters to help them ‘Restore the Balance’. In contrast to the overall bland pitch, Labor employed the techniques of targeted direct mailing to voters extensively. In selected seats voters were inundated with personal letters and brochures promising specific local commitments and addressing issues pertinent to the particular electorate.

Till Defeat Us Do Part — the Coalition’s Plight

The coalition had earlier generated a range of policy propositions (claiming from the outset a total of 101 as if the figure were magical). The trouble was no one really believed this, read any of them, took them seriously or considered they would be in a position to implement any of them. Even at times the aggregate total seemed more important to Springborg than the ability to sell or elaborate on them in much detail.¹⁶ One exception was the policy to exempt first home-buyers of stamp duty on residential homes up to a purchase price of \$250,000 — the government took more notice of this promise than the electorate and matched the offer (with a little more credibility) around 10 days before the poll.

Yet, the coalition was looking better than it had for some time thanks to a new truce negotiated in mid-2003. The agreement included a division of the 89 state seats between the two parties (with some strange outcomes in some regions) — hence the absence of three-cornered contests. Going into the election both leaders presented a united front, with Springborg and Bob Quinn touring provincial towns and the sugar seats together — resulting in Quinn suffering criticism for being dragged off to rural and regional centres where Liberal votes were inconsequential. Some Liberals resented Quinn’s absence from the metropolitan and south-east coastal areas — electorates vital for the long-term survival of the party, and seats they desperately needed to win back.¹⁷ They also resented the Liberals having to comply with the

¹⁶ For instance the figure of 101 policies was repeatedly mentioned by Springborg during the Leaders’ Debate on 6.2.2004.

¹⁷ The Liberals held one seat in Brisbane (Moggill) from about 38 metropolitan seats, one on the Gold Coast (Robina) out of 9, and one on the Sunshine Coast (Caloundra) out of 7 — a total of 3 out of 54 seats in the south-east corner.

National's stance on tree-clearing, daylight saving, and trading hours — while pretending these suited their support base of urbane professionals and business people (*Courier-Mail* 20.1.2004). Springborg's commitment to embrace a 'progressive conservative' agenda sounded hollow to urban Liberal voters.

The sports-gambling firm Centre-bet indicated that their punters felt the National's leader had as much chance of becoming premier as the Namibian rugby team had of beating the Wallabies in the world cup (*Courier-Mail* 16.1.2004). Such observations perhaps contributed to Springborg's defeatist statement that he was 'in for the long haul', with indications he was placing reform of the coalition as his immediate priority in order to have a chance at winning government at a future election (Leaders' Debate 6.2.2004). Springborg's tactic seemed to be more about positioning himself for a more serious tilt at government in 2007.

The Coalition's much-vaunted unity would subsequently prove illusory in the aftermath of the election, when the veneer of harmony started to peel as the two groups bickered over the cause of the results as well as over entitlements and political titles (such as who would be deputy opposition leader).

One Nation's Invisible Campaign

Strangest of all, One Nation contested the 2004 election with their iconic leader Pauline Hanson, only just released from gaol, taking almost no part in the proceedings. She made one appearance in the final days of the election at a small protest rally held outside the front gates of the Parliament over the issue of political interference in the judiciary. It made no impact. With Hanson almost invisible,¹⁸ the party's parliamentary leader and former policeman, Bill Flynn, appeared to be lacking in direction or enthusiasm. This was not helped by the fact that One Nation was broke and according to its campaign director had chosen to conduct the election without any paid TV advertising (*Australian* 15.1.2004). Taking a novel approach to campaigning, Flynn admitted he had chosen not to door-knock his rural electorate of Lockyer, especially after taking journalists to a local pub and finding he recognised none of the regulars and they did not recognise him (*Weekend Australian* 31.1.2004: 28). Instead, on many days throughout the three-week campaign, the One Nation leader was sighted around the deserted parliamentary precinct in Brisbane, choosing to drink beer back in his government provided flat (Bennett and Newman 2004: 9). One Nation promised to stand at least 70 candidates but in the end nominated 51 candidates of which only one, Rosa Lee Long, a sitting member survived in the North Queensland seat of Tablelands.

¹⁸ Hanson announced after leaving prison (she was eventually cleared of any wrong-doing by the state's Court of Appeal) that she was not returning to politics but was opening a new career in property development — where 'she's going to make a lot of money' helped by Sydney businessman Michael Kordek (*Australian* 15.1.2004).

Occasional Odd Blips on the Radar

In the absence of any major issue, some sectional interests made a play for the available air-time. Sugar farmers keen to leverage financial support from both the federal and state governments ambushed Beattie at the kerbside. In Cairns the scene turned rowdy as a ‘posse of angry sugar farmers . . . stormed his car’ (*Weekend Australian* 31.1.2004). The farmers were spurred on by the maverick federal independent (and former National) MP, Bob Katter, who managed to capture attention by shouting the Premier down, and by some local One Nation members. Beattie criticised Katter’s actions as an ugly ‘political stunt’.

The Nationals were forced to sack two candidates in the three-week campaign. The first was Maryborough candidate, Michael Giles, who was dumped for not admitting to a domestic violence order when seeking pre-selection. The second was a more bizarre case of a former anarchist and Nazi party member, Dan van Blarcom, who was preselected and nominated for Whitsunday before his past surfaced in national papers. Shown sitting in Canberra in 1970 with Nazi swastika and black leather jacket, van Blarcom, now a sea captain, was disendorsed too late to remove the National Party label from the ballot paper.

As a last gasp measure to save Merri Rose and shore up support in the southern Gold Coast seats, the Premier announced that a re-elected Labor government would expedite the troubled Tugan bypass motorway (a long planned freeway to ameliorate a major bottleneck but yet to eventuate). With Transport department costings, it appeared unusual for a government in caretaker mode to signpost a policy that would mean the resumption of homes (evoking emotions by those affected similar to those dramatised in the film *The Castle*). The risk of indicating land resumptions so close to the poll was the most obvious sign that the government believed the seat of Currumbin was all but lost.

Finally the Premier made two silly slips that captured attention on otherwise dull news days. First he made a joke overheard by a radio announcer that someone impersonating Lawrence Springborg would ‘have to do a lobotomy real quick’. Second, he stated he had visited the women of the Aboriginal community of Cherbourg as premier when in fact he had not — although he had earlier visited the community. Both these errors were pounced on as evidence that Beattie made gaffs but then tried to cover up to avoid damage.

The Electoral Outcome and New Ministry

Despite an actual 1.9 per cent swing against the Beattie government, and a swing of almost 7 per cent to the combined Liberal and National parties’ vote, the government was returned with 63 seats (or 70.8 per cent of the Assembly seats). Labor recorded a net loss of only three seats, although more seats changed hands. Labor lost four seats (losing Burdekin, Burnett and Charters Towers to the

Nationals and Currumbin to the Liberals), but the party gained Keppel from the Nationals. The Liberals held their three existing seats (Robina, Moggill and Caloundra (the latter only just by 1.3 per cent), and picked up Surfers Paradise from an independent and crushingly defeated Merri Rose in Currumbin (with an 18 per cent swing). The Nationals recorded a net gain of three seats after they won Lockyer back from the One Nation leader Bill Flynn. The repeat landslide outcome left the government with a 37 seat majority on the floor of the chamber.

2004 Queensland State Election Results

Party	Candidates standing	Formal votes (n)	Formal votes %	Seats won (+/-)	Net swing
ALP	89	1,011,630	47.0	63 (-3)	-1.9
NPA	41	365,005	16.9	15 (+3)	+2.8
Libs	47	398,147	18.5	5 (+2)	+4.2
Greens	72	145,522	6.7	-	+4.3
One Nation	51	104,980	4.9	1 (-1)	-3.8
Democrats	1	943	0.04	-	-0.3
Independents	52	125,516	5.8	5 (-1)	-5.5
Informal		43,657	2.0		

Source: Electoral Commission Queensland, 2004

The Greens recorded their highest state vote with some candidates winning over 20 per cent of the vote (in Mt Coot-tha and South Brisbane). In 16 seats the Greens vote was in double figures. One Nation fell back to its lowest result since 1998 when the party first contested a state election. Most of the One Nation vote had drifted back to the other two conservative parties with each gaining a small positive swing. The vote for independents also dropped generally across the state (except where sitting independents were ensconced). Only one sitting member, Lex Bell in Surfers Paradise, lost their seat, while four of the other five recorded large swings towards them. Indeed, some of these independents now sat on huge margins after the final distribution of preferences (Peter Wellington in Nicklin with 79.5 per cent; Chris Foley in Maryborough on 68.0 per cent; Dorothy Pratt in Nanango on 62.7 per cent; Liz Cunningham in Gladstone on 61.2 per cent and Elisa Roberts in Gympie on 60.0 per cent).¹⁹

Beattie announced his new ministry on 12 February causing a few surprises and severe disappointment among many of those previously touted as destined for the front bench. There were six vacancies in all with three retirements, one minister defeated (Rose) and two demoted (Nita Cunningham and Dean Wells). While the

¹⁹ These popular independents received large swings in 2004 — with Foley receiving a swing of +14.5 per cent, Cunningham +7.7 per cent, Roberts +6.8 per cent, Wellington +5.1 per cent. Pratt alone lost ground with a swing against her of -4.3 per cent.

senior ministers largely remained in their previous portfolios (Peter Beattie as Premier and Trade minister; Terry Mackenroth as Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Sports minister; Anna Bligh as Education and Arts minister; Rob Swarten as Works and Housing minister; Rob Welford as Attorney-General; Henry Palaszczuk as Primary Industries and Fisheries minister; and Stephen Robertson as Natural Resources, Mines and Energy minister), a number of other serving ministers were moved around. Apparently, the health and police portfolios were difficult to fill — with none of the senior ministers wanting these poisoned chalices (Rob Welford in particular declined Health). Eventually, two ministers with little bargaining power were persuaded to serve, Gordon Nuttall in Health and Judy Spence in Police. Warren Pitt returned to the ministry (from 1996) as minister for Communities and Disability Services. Five other new faces were promoted — John Mickel (Environment); Desley Boyle (Local Government and Planning) and Margaret Keech (Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry). Two novices were promoted to the ministry above the factions (Chris Cummins — who became Emergency Services minister and Liddy Clark who was made minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders — an appointment that caused some controversy because she was Brisbane-based and lacked previous involvement with indigenous communities).

Regional representation was an important consideration in determining the new composition with Pitt and Boyle from northern Queensland, Keech and Cummins from the Gold and Sunshine Coasts respectively, Mickel from Logan and Clark from Brisbane. Beattie had apparently gone around to the three main factions telling them how many they were entitled to and from what region of the state they were to select someone. The AWU ended up with three of the new positions (Pitt, Boyle and Mickel) compared to one each for the Labor Unity/Old Guard (Cummins) and the Left (Keech), and one factionally independent (Clark). The AWU's position was bolstered by the fact they lost comparatively few seats in the election and were entitled to three positions (one replacing Rose, and two from organising 'departures').

Conclusion

The outcome gave little solace to the conservative side of politics. The National's tactic of waiting for a natural correction ('restore the balance') had not worked. They had captured only two net seats from Labor although with their new electorates they had achieved wider geographic representation. The Liberals were fortunate to have four new members — and although Bob Quinn noted that together the Liberals represented a party that was the 'highest polling conservative party in the State' (on 18.5 per cent) the result in terms of seats was the Liberals second worst result ever. One Nation appears a spent force, with most of its momentum dissipated. Conservative-oriented independents did well often at the expense of right-of-centre political parties — these five independents began to form a loose alliance in the new parliament.

If the twenty-six day campaign began with a whimper, it ended with little more than a resigned sigh. The outcome was always a foregone conclusion, but the fact that it became a repeat landslide was not. If the Queensland election of 2004 appears a *lay down misère* it was principally due to the political context of the day magnified by the extraordinary strategy of ‘non-campaigning’ by both sides. Risk aversion allowed ‘Re-Pete Pete’ to win a third term without appearing to try. ▲

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