

## **A conservative débâcle: the electoral rout in Queensland 2001**

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The Queensland Labor government was forced into an early election in February 2001 — with some six months of its first term still remaining. The poll was caused by the fall-out of a damaging ‘electoral rorts’ scandal involving the Labor Party — especially members of the powerful Australian Workers’ Union faction. While the initial allegations of electoral fraud involved pre-selection battles in two Townsville seats, the eventual repercussions would engulf the entire party, costing Premier Peter Beattie his deputy and two backbenchers.

The Beattie government began as a minority administration in July 1998 with 44 seats in the 89 seat Legislative Assembly. They relied on the support of one and sometimes two Independents, Peter Wellington (Nicklin) and Liz Cunningham (Gladstone). The far-right populist party One Nation had captured 11 seats in the 1998 election and reduced the combined Coalition Opposition to just 32 (the National Party with 23 and the Liberals with 9). Labor became a majority government in December 1989 after winning a by-election in the seat of Mulgrave caused by the resignation of a One Nation member.

For almost two years the Beattie government enjoyed a one-seat parliamentary majority. But as the electoral rorts scandal deepened Labor’s credibility was tested. A teary-eyed Beattie took a strong stand against the self-confessed electoral rorters within his own party — both MPs and ordinary party members. With cases of electoral fraud hanging over the heads of two and finally three Labor parliamentarians, the government adjourned Parliament in mid-November 2000 (still with a backlog of 22 pieces of legislation on the notice paper), not intending to recall Parliament in the New Year. The Liberals accused Beattie of being scared of allowing Parliament to meet, fearing he would lose his majority on the floor of the Assembly. But Beattie was not fearful of lacking the confidence of the House: rather he did not wish to be seen to be relying on two former Labor members who had admitted electoral fraud in the event that the Independents would no longer support his government.

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The sudden resignation of the Deputy Premier Jim Elder — first from the ministry and then a week later from the Labor Party — followed by the resignation of backbencher Grant Musgrove from the party, meant the Beattie government ended the year 2000 back in minority government. Unable to clear the air or recall Parliament, the political hiatus was ended in mid-January when Peter Beattie announced an early election to be held on 17 February 2001 — initiating a 26-day campaign, the shortest permissible under the *Electoral Act*. His decision brought on the final act of a whirlwind of politics that had consumed Queensland since mid-2000. The outcome would be an electoral rout of the conservative National and Liberal parties. And coming one week after the unexpected Labor victory in Western Australia, Labor's massive win in Queensland put pressure on the federal Coalition government causing a series of policy 'backflips' and concessions.

### *The pre-election context*

The Beattie Labor government was seen as a competent administration, pro-active in employment generation and in service delivery. Labor introduced its third relatively successful State Budget on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2000 with spending of \$18.2 billion and a substantial capital works program of \$5.3 billion (adding an additional 60,000 jobs and representing an injection of a record \$15 billion in capital spending over its first three Budgets). Unemployment remained a major community concern, with Labor committed to reducing the jobless figure to a target of 5% by 2003. The rate of unemployment fell to 6% in 1999, but by mid-2000 was again on the rise climbing to 7.9% at the time of the Budget.

Yet Labor enjoyed widespread popular support throughout 2000. From June to October 2000 Labor's primary support in opinion polls was in the vicinity of 49–51% translating into an equally impressive level of support of over 60% in two-party preferred terms. Labor was riding high enjoying its highest popular support since the immediate post-Fitzgerald days of 1989–91. By contrast, the lacklustre Coalition was unable to peg back Labor's lead. Their combined primary support was of the order of 33–34%. Support for Independents and minor parties floated around 18% with the Democrats attracting 6%, One Nation registering between 3–6% and the Greens at 3.5% (*The Bulletin*, 3.10.2000:20 and 5.12.2000:20). An off-shoot of One Nation, the City-Country Alliance Queensland (CCAQ), created by six former One Nation MPs, hardly rated in official polls.

Peter Beattie was also hugely popular. His unshakeable personal approval rating remained close to 60% — and the more he was perceived to be taking tough action in the electoral rorts scandal the more his approval rating climbed. His opponent, Rob Borbidge, also a former Premier, paled by comparison, attracting a personal approval rating of just 15%. Borbidge's low standing in the electorate was an important factor six-months out from the actual election date. However, while Borbidge's leadership came under scrutiny, his position was never seriously threatened. His Coalition partner and Liberal leader, Dr David Watson, was not so fortunate. Watson upset many party colleagues by opposing the federal Coalition's plan to pass on the full GST spike in the petrol excise increase due in February 2001. Some federal Coalition MPs urged Watson to resign when he refused to defend Prime Minister John Howard's policy on the petrol excise. Watson was also undermined by a dissident faction in the State division of the

Liberal party led by Bob Carroll and Santo Santoro. But as no rival came forward the challenge evaporated. In the end the Liberal's leadership woes merely underlined the potency of petrol prices among voters.

### *Allegations of electoral rotting – the Shepherdson inquiry*

Allegations of electoral fraud involving Labor Party factions emerged in Townsville in 1998. Initially, three people were charged and the occurrence appeared an isolated incident. But more substantial allegations followed in August 2000, and soon preoccupied the attention of both the media and the government. The later accusations came from Labor Party insiders who were engaged in pay-back politics against factional rivals. The new allegations of electoral fraud came from Karen Ehrmann, a former endorsed Labor candidate for Mundingburra and a member of the powerful AWU faction in Townsville. Ehrmann was one of the first three charged with electoral fraud. But she confessed at her trial in mid-August that she was 'just a bit player' in a much larger vote-fixing scam involving the AWU faction including many of its senior identities. She alleged the AWU operated a secret 'slush fund' to pay for ALP memberships and that lists of false memberships had been maintained to fight pre-selection battles within the ALP. Ehrmann pleaded guilty to the charges of electoral forgery and uttering and was given a three-year sentence — nine months to be spent in gaol. Her allegations were such that the Attorney General Matt Foley decided to ask the Electoral Commissioner Des O'Shea to review Ehrmann's court evidence. With the Opposition also calling for an inquiry, O'Shea decided the allegations were of a serious nature. The matters were referred to the Criminal Justice Commission which announced it would conduct an initial investigation.

The initial inquiry was conducted by a Brisbane barrister, Phillip McMurdo QC. He soon found evidence that the practices extended far beyond Townsville, and included unusual patterns of enrolments in safe Labor seats in Brisbane around the time of ALP preselections. McMurdo's report was tabled in early September, in which he claimed there was reasonable suspicion of misconduct and recommended further investigations be carried out against a number of Labor MPs and senior Labor identities. The CJC concurred and announced the establishment of a special inquiry with the powers of a royal commission on 6 September. Led by a retired Supreme Court judge, Tom Shepherdson, the inquiry began its investigations on 3 October. The Shepherdson inquiry heard detailed evidence from a number of former and serving AWU factional operatives, including a disaffected former party organiser Lee Birmingham. Birmingham told the inquiry that members of the AWU regularly made false electoral enrolments for factional advantage as part of a culture of branch-stacking.

The Shepherdson inquiry soon began investigating the actions of a number of sitting state MPs — including Grant Musgrove (Springwood), Paul Lucas (Lytton), Mike Reynolds (Townsville), Gary Fenlon (Greenslopes) and Mike Kaiser (Woodridge). Allegations were also aired about sitting federal ALP members. The Mayor of Townsville, Tony Mooney, a former unsuccessful Labor candidate for Mundingburra, was named as one of the principals involved in the Townsville rorts. In short, the inquiry found around 30 members of the party had been involved in various electoral frauds, with many personally admitting to cases of forgery.

For Beattie, the unravelling of Labor's internal feuding together with confessions of illegal tampering with the electoral rolls, looked likely to cost him government. Nevertheless, he publicly supported Shepherdson's inquiry and did not attempt to interfere with the course of its investigations. Beattie admitted the inquiry was painful but claimed it would have beneficial effects in the longer-term. He insisted that rorting was unacceptable and gave a firm commitment to expel anyone found guilty of rorting from the party. Sitting on a one-seat majority, he stated he would risk the survival of his government rather than rely on the support of the fraudsters.

Realising the rorts issue offered an opportunity to hurt the popular Premier, Borbidge repeatedly challenged Beattie to call an early election as a means of clearing the air. He offered to support the Beattie government, in the event Parliament was recalled, in passing electoral legislation to prevent future voter fraud. Business leaders likewise echoed the call for an early election as a way of ending uncertainty and assisting business confidence. But Beattie continued to insist that he would run full-term to May 2001.

The most dramatic turn of events occurred in late November when the Premier was in Japan on a trade mission. The inquiry began investigating allegations that the Deputy Premier Jim Elder had knowingly and illegally signed six false electoral forms for family members in his seat of Capalaba. As acting Premier, Elder called a press conference on Wednesday 22 November at which he admitted his actions and announced his resignation as Deputy Premier. He resigned from the ALP a week later, indicating he would be withdrawing from politics. A young Labor backbencher, Grant Musgrove (Springwood), was forced to admit under oath that he had signed false electoral enrolments. Although admitting to fraud he was initially reluctant to resign from the party, offering to resign only from any parliamentary positions and from the Parliamentary Labor Party (the name of the parliamentary caucus but not itself a legal entity). After a series of meetings with party officials Musgrove was forced to resign from the ALP in early December and in doing so he confirmed that he would not be a candidate at the next election. At this stage neither Elder nor Musgrove resigned their parliamentary seats.

Elder's resignation created a ministerial vacancy. In a minor ministerial reshuffle, Beattie appointed Terry Mackenroth as Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development (retaining Sport, Communication and Information from his previous portfolio) and promoted Nita Cunningham (from the AWU faction) to cabinet as Minister for Local Government and Planning. Although from the Labor Unity faction (the same as the Premier), Mackenroth's promotion received the support of the AWU faction — principally as a means of preventing the Left's candidate, Family Services minister Anna Bligh, from securing the deputy's position. Beattie gave an extraordinary justification for promoting Mackenroth, saying he needed a 'strong son of a bitch who will stand by me, to protect my back from the scum who are going to be squashed'. He added, 'Terry is the hard-head who will get tough — along with me — with the rorters' and will be prepared to 'kick and kick' (*Australian*, 27.11.2000).

The Shepherdson inquiry announced it would produce an interim report in January, but would resume for two weeks of additional hearings (from 10 January) into voting irregularities around the 1986 state election involving the former State Secretary of the ALP Mike Kaiser (the new member for Woodridge). Kaiser was a senior AWU faction

leader whose name had been associated at the inquiry with 'camp stories' of electoral fraud told at Young Labor get-togethers. But there appeared no hard evidence against him. The inquiry chose to go back to the mid-1980s (when Kaiser was a 22 year old undergraduate). When confronted with a false electoral enrolment form he had signed enrolling himself in South Brisbane, Kaiser admitted he had broken the law. He had no alternative but to announce he would not contest the next election and would resign from the party (*Courier-Mail*, 11.1.2001).

### ***To the polls***

Beattie continued to claim that the rest of his parliamentary team were a 'clean team'. He maintained the evidence to the Shepherdson inquiry demonstrated that the rorters were 'just a tiny cell of people acting alone, and they have resigned or been expelled, and I don't believe anyone else is involved' (*Courier-Mail*, 17.1.2001). On 19 January the legal counsel assisting the inquiry, Russell Hanson QC, released a 76 page draft submission to Shepherdson recommending whether to proceed with charges against individuals named at the inquiry. The submission stated that no further charges were likely against any sitting Labor parliamentarian. The reasons for this were that charges could effectively only be brought against individuals for forgery, false enrolment was not a criminal offence under the State's Criminal Code, and that under amendments to the Commonwealth and State *Electoral Acts*, a statute of limitations of one year applied to prosecutions for other electoral offences. The submission argued that much of the evidence gained by the inquiry was therefore outside this period, may not stand up in court or be likely to produce successful convictions. Charges of forgery were only recommended against two non-parliamentary AWU figures (Tony Mooney and a former Goss staffer David Barbagallo). The *Courier-Mail's* editorial lamented 'electoral earthquake: not many casualties . . . they have not been exonerated but they will not be charged' (20.1.2001). *The Australian* was more blunt: 'Vote-rorts MPs escape prosecution' (20–21.1.2001). There was also speculation that because of the type of evidence obtained and witnesses involved, no one would ever be successfully prosecuted.

Meanwhile, Beattie was now engaged on a three-week 'listening tour' visiting shopping centres around the State, catching rush-hour buses, walking down city malls and talking to ordinary Queenslanders. His decision bought time while giving the impression he was consulting the voters about whether to call an early election. He also attempted to divert media attention by engaging in a number of stunts, including swimming with sharks, nursing piglets and wearing funny hats at events and on construction sites. His new antics were labelled 'clown politics' by sections of the media, premised on the motto: 'laugh and the world laughs with you, be serious and the people get bored' (*Courier-Mail*, 16.1.2001). *The Australian* commented that Beattie was 'a confessed media tart with a grin that sometimes puts the Cheshire cat to shame' (24.1.2001).

With Hanson's submission not recommending charges against his parliamentary line-up, Beattie felt free to call a snap poll knowing no further damaging evidence would be likely to surface in the election campaign itself. To him, Hanson's legal opinion was an exoneration and provided an opportunity to go to the people before the final report was finalised. After revealing some tougher laws and internal party rules for electoral fairness he announced the poll on 23 January setting the election date for the 17 February. The nomination period for candidates closed on 30 January.

Significantly, on the same day Beattie announced the election, One Nation was re-registered as a political party in Queensland. The registration process had been delayed until Pauline Hanson had repaid the \$500,000 in public funding given after the 1998 State election, but later ruled illegal after the party was found to be improperly registered in 1999. The Queensland Electoral Commission completed the registration process with Hanson announcing she had already selected six candidates for the election. With the re-registration of One Nation, the Labor government faced a divided opposition consisting of four right of centre parties.

### *The campaign*

The main lines of the campaign were clear from the start. Labor's campaign was not just organised around the Premier; Beattie *was* Labor's campaign. It was a presidential-style campaign focused on Beattie's popularity. Leadership was Labor's main strength and the Coalition found it hard to attack his image or standing in the community. TV ads promoted the smiling Premier 'heading in the right direction' while Labor's website redirected users to Beattie's own website — Beattie2001.net — leading Borbidge to claim 'we've got a Beattie dot-com campaign' (*Australian*, 25.1.2001). For Beattie the campaign was about a 'fresh start' and 'an opportunity for Queenslanders to put behind us the events of recent times' (*Australian* 24.1.2001).

The Coalition parties campaigned separately. Both focused on attacking Labor over the rorts scandal, pushing their main lines of 'don't reward the rorters', and 'no matter what you think of Peter Beattie...you've got to worry about the company he keeps'. Borbidge initially stressed his record in office and his commitment to increasing employment. But it soon became clear that the Nationals were more interested in looking over their own shoulder at threats from One Nation and independents in their own seats, and the Liberals virtually disappeared from view. One media report claimed that the Liberal leader was missing in action within the first week of the campaign; another called him the 'invisible man'. Questions were also raised over Borbidge's appeal to voters; Labor capitalised on this, labelling him a whinger in their ads. Borbidge got off to a bad start when he was ejected by security guards from a Townsville shopping centre. Worse was to come.

At the start of the election the City-Country Alliance urged One Nation to join forces and campaign together — but this overture was rejected outright by Pauline Hanson. The CCAQ leader Bill Feldman had not established a campaign office at the start of the campaign, but offered to support One Nation candidates as they had the same goals — presumably also intending some seat-sharing arrangements or a commitment not to contest against each other. But such was not to be the case. The CCAQ generated campaign slogans rather than policies (for example, a referendum on capital punishment and to restore the right of parents to hit children), while Pauline Hanson left Queensland after the first week to campaign in the Western Australian State election, called one week ahead of the Queensland poll. Hanson did not campaign in Queensland until the final week of the campaign (when she attracted far more national attention for her clothes than her policies) when the party produced a 16 page list of uncosted policies. Unlike the 1998 campaign when Hanson travelled to every country town talking to the locals, in 2001 she campaigned more like a film-star flying from locations in a helicopter and making quick appearances.

Policy issues paled in comparison. Both major parties matched each other policy-for-policy across the standard issues of health, education, jobs and law and order. Both promised over 2000 extra police, over 2000 additional teachers, more apprenticeships, additional jobs for Queensland, shorter hospital waiting lists and tougher sentencing for crime. These policies tapped into voter concerns showing in the polls (health care, law and order, job security and education). Both sides announced policies on water and dams, the environment, drug enforcement and rehabilitation, and regional industry promotion. In only a few policy areas did differences occur (for example, the rate of forestry clearing and provisions to sack 'dud' workers). Federal issues such as tax compliance with the GST, high petrol prices and dairy deregulation captured limited media attention but these issues showed up as voter concerns in polling. The net effect of the main parties matching each other on virtually all policies was to neutralise policy as a campaign issue.

Four features were evident from the opinion polls conducted throughout the campaign. First the electoral rorts issue had hurt Labor but only marginally — with the party sitting on around 43% popular support from December through to the second week of the campaign. Polls showed Labor started the campaign comfortably ahead in key marginal seats (*Courier-Mail*, 27.1.2001). By the middle of the campaign Labor had increased its support to 52% only to fall back slightly to 49% in the last days (*Weekend Australian*, 17–18.2.2001). Second, as the campaign began polls showed a collapse of the conservative vote — with the Liberals falling from 23% to just 11% while the Nationals fell from 16% to 9%. Third, the polls indicated a strong approval rating for Beattie (increasing to 66% by the end of the campaign) with a low approval for Borbidge (13%). Fourth, the One Nation vote did not rise dramatically as it had done in 1998 (finishing at 23% at the election); rather, the party began the campaign at around 3-5% and climbed to a figure of 8-12% by the end. The CCAQ rarely rated in opinion polls, and in seat specific polling of the seats they held they were trailing the other major candidates.

A total of 365 candidates stood for election (89 Labor, 45 Nationals, 50 Liberals, 39 One Nation, 31 Greens, 25 CCAQ, 6 Democrats, and 1 Christian Democrat). A large number of independents stood — 79 (not, as was often asserted, a record number of independents). An electoral redistribution in 2000 had changed around three-quarters of the 89 seats with a number of old seats abolished or renamed with new boundaries.

### ***The wheels fall off the coalition's campaign***

Labor made an important tactical move at the end of the first week of the campaign. Instead of recommending Labor voters complete their ballot by allocating full preferences, Labor changed its stance to a 'just vote 1' recommendation (effectively exhausting any Labor votes under the State's optional preferential voting system). The effect of this change (announced on the 29 January) meant that many National Party MPs in regional areas, facing a strong One Nation challenge, would not be re-elected without ALP preferences (9 of the 23 Nationals had been returned in 1998 on Labor preferences). Labor's decision reflected pragmatism (and appeared to go back on their earlier commitment to put One Nation last), but it immediately sowed seeds of dissension among local National Party branches.

After Labor's 'vote 1 and out' ploy, the Coalition's campaign descended into disarray over the issue of voter preferences to or from One Nation and the City County Alliance. Borbidge had earlier locked himself into an uncompromising position in relation to National Party preferences. He had consistently rejected any formal exchange of preferences between the Nationals and either One Nation or the CCAQ, but pointed out that decisions would be made on a seat by seat basis. Nevertheless, he stated that 'the chances of One Nation receiving preferences from the National Party will be very, very slight as long as I'm around' (*Courier-Mail*, 3.1.2001). He also asserted that after the election he would not form a coalition with either of these right-wing parties nor rely on them for votes of confidence. The Liberals had also indicated that they would preference One Nation and the CCAQ last. The stance by both the National and Liberal parties was designed to convince voters, the media and their federal Coalition colleagues that they would not be trading preferences with the far-right populist parties. Their decision also meant that the Coalition was unlikely to receive the preferences of One Nation and the CCAQ, which meant many of its members would have difficulty holding their seats.

One Nation meanwhile announced it would adopt a 'spoiler' role by preferencing against every sitting member – on the grounds that they were all part of an establishment elite who acted against the interests of the local electorate. A leading candidate of the breakaway CCA, Ian Petersen, responded to Borbidge's no-preferences stance by claiming, 'I think Mr Borbidge is painting himself into a very small corner because there are a lot of people in his party that wouldn't share that attitude' (*Australian*, 15.1.2001).

On 31 January, just two days after Labor's decision and the day after nominations closed, two North Queensland National Party candidates Barry Moyle (Mulgrave) and Naomi Wilson (Cairns) told Cairns radio that they would break ranks and put Labor last on their how-to-vote cards — swapping preferences with One Nation candidates. Wilson, a former minister in the Borbidge government, issued a 'statement suggesting she had sealed a preference deal with One Nation' (*Courier-Mail*, 1.2.2001). Wilson claimed she was 'inundated with support for the decision' while Pauline Hanson described the renegade Nationals as 'level-headed people' (*Courier-Mail*, 2.2.2001). Initially, six national branches indicated they would swap preferences with One Nation but then two-thirds of the candidates indicated they would follow suit. The breakout brought the National's campaign to a halt, severely undermining Borbidge's leadership and credibility.

The preferencing debacle pushed all other messages from the Coalition to the wings. The Coalition had pinned their hopes on an electoral backlash against Labor after the 'roths scandal', but the issue did not resonate with voters. The attention given to the preferencing issue (essentially an issue of self-preservation for candidates but of little interest to voters) succeeded in leaving Peter Beattie and his style of government as the most pronounced election issue.

Fearing Labor would peak too soon, the ALP leaked what it claimed was its own polling showing a hung Parliament was the most likely outcome (*Courier-Mail*, 5.2.2001). Party officials claimed Labor would fall two to three seats short of a majority. But by the time Labor officially launched its campaign with an election speech on 7 February, the campaign was virtually over. Short of any catastrophic



mistakes, Labor had amassed a winning margin. The victory of the Western Australian Labor Party the Saturday before merely served to underline the political goodwill shown to Labor across the country.

### *The results: a seismic shift*

Within one hour of the polls closing it was clear Labor had been returned to government – and within three hours Labor was looking at a landslide. Labor held all its marginal seats (but with low swings toward the party in three seats – Springwood, Ipswich West and Barron River), won back most of the seats lost in 1998 and captured all the conservative marginals. The Liberals lost six of their nine seats, while the Nationals were reduced from 23 to 12. One Nation managed to win three seats (Lockyer, Gympie and Tablelands), a backward trend since its high-watermark of 11 seats captured in 1998. The CCAQ won no seat, but five Independents managed to capture seats. Days later when counting was finalised it was confirmed that Labor had won a total of 66 seats (an increase of 22 after the redistribution effect and over two-thirds of the Assembly seats). Labor won rural seats such as Burnett, Burdekin, Toowoomba North, and Charters Towers. Of nine Gold Coast seats Labor increased its presence from one seat to eight, and of the five Sunshine Coast seats Labor won three. The final composition of the Assembly was:

Party	Seats won in 1998	Seats won in 2001	Percentage vote in 2001
Labor Party	44 (45)	66	48.93%
National Party	23	12	14.15%
Liberal Party	9	3	14.33%
One Nation	11 (10 then 0)	3	8.7%
CCAQ	- (6)	-	2.39%
Greens	-	-	2.51%
Democrats	-	-	0.34%
Independents	2 (6)	5	8.61%

\* brackets indicate party losses or changes of party status within the term of the Parliament.

Recriminations among the Coalition saw Borbidge resign as leader immediately. On the night of the election, Borbidge claimed somewhat disingenuously he would lose his own seat and consequently would be retiring from politics. But, in fact, he held his seat. He chose to resign from Parliament anyway without taking up his seat when Parliament met on 20 March 2001. During the campaign Borbidge had indicated a number of times that if he lost he would withdraw from public life. Dr Watson also stood down from the Liberal leadership.

After internal party manoeuvring Mike Horan emerged as the National's new leader with Lawrence Springborg remaining as his deputy. The only Liberal not to have taken a turn at the leadership, Bob Quinn, was appointed unopposed in a telephone hook-up with his other two members (Joan Sheldon and David Watson). Quinn looked as if he had been given a poisoned chalice. Horan, the new Opposition leader, announced that the coalition with the Liberals was ended and that the Nationals would constitute the entire shadow ministry even though there were only 11 members to do so and a question mark hung over whether the party would retain Borbidge's seat of Surfers Paradise.

Beattie announced a new ministry on 21 February, promoting three members to his 19-member cabinet (one from each major faction). The new ministers were Mike Reynolds, Gordon Nuttall and Paul Lucas. There was some adverse comment that Labor's factions had not promoted an additional woman to the ministry — although Beattie responded by stating that there were now five women in the ministry — more than any previous ministry. In addition five parliamentary secretaries were appointed, three of whom were women.

The full ministry was:

Premier, Trade and Multicultural Affairs	Peter Beattie
Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Sport and Energy	Terry Mackenroth
Education	Anna Bligh
Employment, Training and Arts	Matt Foley
Health	Wendy Edmond
State Development	Tom Barton
Police and Corrective Services	Tony McGrady
Transport and Main Roads	Steve Bredhauer
Justice and Attorney General	Rod Welford
Environment	Dean Wells
Works and Housing	Rob Schwarten
Families, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Affairs	Judy Spence
Primary Industries and Rural Affairs	Henry Palaszczuk
Tourism, Racing and Fair Trading	Merri Rose
Natural Resources and Mines	Stephen Robertson
Local Government and Planning	Nita Cunningham
Emergency Services & Minister Assisting the Premier in North Queensland	Mike Reynolds
Industrial Relations	Gordon Nuttall
Innovation and Information Technology	Paul Lucas

### *The future parliament*

Labor's overwhelming victory not only swelled its own ranks but significantly reduced the parliamentary talent of the Opposition. Many hard-working Coalition members lost their seats including Santo Santoro, Denver Beanland, Doug Slack, John Hegarty, and Graham Healy. The former National Party leader and Premier Russell Cooper had also retired at the election, and the Opposition will lose the skills of Rob Borbidge. The 11 remaining National Party shadow ministers now have to shadow virtually two portfolios each, which raises concerns about the quality of parliamentary scrutiny. The fact that the Nationals have not shared the shadow ministry positions with either the Liberals or with Independents may be to their short term political interest but not in the best interests of holding the government to account through parliamentary scrutiny and debate. Arguably members such as Liz Cunningham, Peter Wellington, Bob Quinn and David Watson would have made better shadow appointees than some of the time-serving Nationals currently on the front bench.

Labor now has a sizeable backbench to manage (42 not in the ministry or performing as a parliamentary secretary). Beattie's crushing win is also likely to have delivered many 'oncers' to Parliament — members who unexpectedly won seats but who are liable to be turned out after one term once a correction occurs. These 'oncers' could pose problems for Labor, initially basking in the greater glory but then, as time passes, nervously eyeing the approaching election and perhaps becoming unruly or desperate. Anna Bligh has been appointed Leader of the House and along with the Labor whips will have the job of containing the enthusiasms of this substantial backbench. Beattie has also canvassed the notion of developing a more extensive legislative and policy caucus committee system — with Labor's backbenchers given the opportunity to have more meaningful input into policy development with the relevant ministers and their departments.

There is uncertainty over how the parliamentary committee system will operate for the duration of the Parliament. Retaining the same membership numbers as currently exists on the committees (generally six) would imply that almost all non-Labor members will be expected to serve on the committees and double up for estimates committees in the Budget sittings. It is also unclear how the non-Labor side will decide which of them should go onto which committee — especially as the Liberals, One Nation and the five Independents do not attract party status in the Parliament and are not officially the Opposition. Labor may be tempted to increase the membership of the committees by an additional one or two simply to occupy its backbench members.

The issue of resources for the Opposition was raised in March before Parliament resumed. With only 12 members of the Opposition, Beattie cut some resources to the Opposition and redistributed these to other non-government members. Each non-ministerial member of the Assembly was also allocated a second full-time electoral assistant to assist with their representational activities.

Beattie has committed his government to continue his consultative style of administration, including the retention of three-weekly community cabinet meetings and regional community forums held throughout the State. He has already established a Community Engagement Division in the Premier's Department charged with the responsibility of facilitating a more interactive involvement of ordinary Queenslanders with government and with input into policy decisions. His honest way of dealing with issues and direct communication style with voters has been commented on favourably — even by his political opponents including the Prime Minister. His victory has won him an extended honeymoon with both his own party and with the wider electorate. While the Opposition will endeavour to whittle away his political stocks, it is likely they are in for a long haul and it may take two or three terms for them to appear an electable alternative government. The One Nation phenomenon and its populist appeal to the disaffected has not disappeared although it has somewhat abated. But the fragmentation of the conservative side of politics seems set to continue despite the voters' judgment on 17 February. Unless Horan and the other non-Labor members can build a collaborative Opposition, Beattie's Labor administration will be hard to dislodge. As Bill Ludwig, head of the AWU faction said after the election outcome, 'the only way we'll get rid of Beattie now is to put a camera in the middle of a freeway'. ▲