



***AUSTRALASIAN STUDY OF
PARLIAMENT GROUP
(Queensland Chapter)***

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Mr W. K. GOSS: Paul Reynolds, parliamentary colleagues, parliamentary aficionados, one and all, I have been given a pretty open brief for tonight and it is difficult to know what to include and what to leave out. I have a few headings here and we will see where it ends up.

Some time towards the end of my comments, the bells will ring and the members of Parliament will leave. Fortunately, Clem Campbell is acting Whip for a short time this afternoon so I have leave and therefore can stay here and drone on at some length. I will commence with an anecdote and if there is time I will conclude with an anecdote to show you just how much I have learned during my time in Parliament.

From the first, I was made a shadow Minister. I was shadow Minister for Lands, Forestry and Police. I was a lawyer prior to coming into Parliament, so they thought that I would know something about police. I certainly knew nothing at all about lands and forestry. I remember fairly soon in my time in the shadow Ministry I came into possession of information in relation to the importation of drugs on the Sunshine Coast and parts north. I called a press conference. The various members of the media were there. Also there was Max Jessop—the late Max Jessop—who was the political journalist for the Gold Coast Bulletin. He had a look at the press release which had nothing to do with the Gold Coast and asked, "What have you got for the Gold Coast? I have got the front page tomorrow." I said, "Max, for the lead in the Gold Coast Bulletin, I will say that the Gold Coast is the crime capital of Australia." I said, "No, better than that, the southern hemisphere." Anyway, we all laughed and I heard nothing more about it until half past 5 the next morning when radio station 4GG rang to say that they would like to get some quotes from me on the story in the Gold Coast Bulletin. I said, "What story?" They said, "The front page story, Gold Coast crime capital of the southern hemisphere." I gave them a couple of quotes and sort of fudged my credibility and protected Max. I saw him at Parliament later that morning and I said, "Max, what were you doing? Everybody at the press conference knew that was a joke." He looked at me as if I was a bit naïve—and that was something that happened many times in my career thereafter—and said, "Wayne, what are you worried about? You are on the front page of the paper."

Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on your point of view, that has become an increasing part of the role of a member of Parliament and the role of the media in the way in which it reports politics. I think that the role of the media has changed. I do not think that it has changed for the better.

Let me tell you a couple of other stories about my time in Opposition. At one stage when I was Opposition Justice spokesperson, I was pursuing Russ Hinze over a range of issues where I was alleging a conflict of interest. You will remember those were the days when we did not have a declaration of pecuniary interests. In fact, I think the then Premier operated on the basis that if you knew something about an industry and you had some ownership in it, then you were very well qualified to administer it as well. Anyway, I remember one day I was pursuing Russ over an alleged conflict of interest which had arisen. I think I was probably a bit "suspicious and unfair", but he was the Minister for Racing; he had responsibility for the TAB; he had a tavern at Oxenford the driveway of which the Pacific Highway runs through, and there was a TAB licence to be allocated to Oxenford. It was to go to a newsagent couple, but it was recommended instead to go to the Oxenford Tavern, or adjacent to it. Anyway, I was able to produce a document and table it. Russ and I had our respective press conferences and battered each other around the head. I left and walked onto the veranda out here and I heard a voice call out, "Hey, Gossie." I turned around and there is Russ lumbering along the veranda. He said, "Come and have a beer." This was about 11 o'clock in the morning, which is a little bit early for me, but it seemed like an offer that was too good to refuse. So we wandered into the Strangers Bar, which in those days was where the Strangers Dining Room is now. I will never forget it, because he was a pretty colourful character and also there were two usually reliable witnesses, John Stubbs who was then the political correspondent for the Sunday Sun and Quentin Dempster, who was then with the Telegraph or the 7.30 Report. Anyway, Hinze bought me a beer and he said, "Listen, why don't you go after some of those other bastards. They are much more corrupt than I am." I did not know at first what to make of this offer but, usually being fairly quick to spot an opportunity, I said, "Look, I will be in that, Russ, but on one condition." He said, "What's that?" I said, "You have got to provide me with the documents." He just laughed, had another drink of his beer, and on we went.

That was an interesting, very colourful episode and also, I think, an interesting example of how people can battle it out in politics but perhaps, hopefully, also remain on good terms on a personal level. It does also, however, underline a serious issue and that is the potential for conflict of interest: the necessity of having the sort of transparency that we have these days, which I think can and should give the public a lot more confidence in the Government that they have irrespective of which party it is.

So much for the terrible misdeeds of the coalition! I also had some interesting experiences in the Labor Party. I will relate one. We had a very tense period at one stage. Clem Campbell, myself and

others who came in in 1983 were the young turks. As you know, the definition of a "young turk" is anybody who came in at the last election. Anybody who came in more than one election ago is an old turk and a problem. Anyway, we had formed into two broad groups. With a couple of other odds and sods we had managed to put together about half of the caucus of 30 people. We were going to take them on on some very important issue, which I cannot recall now. In any event, the last vote came down to a battle between myself and a prominent member of the Labor Unity, or old guard faction as it was then called, and the vote was tied 15 all. It turned out that the person who I tied with for this last position, which was the caucus executive—a very high-powered institution—was also the person who had written the caucus rules. The caucus rules contained a provision to resolve such a dilemma: both names of the candidates were put into a bin, hat, or whatever, and then the chairman of caucus, who happened to be a factional colleague of my opponent and the person who wrote the rules, would then draw one out of the bin. I found out only a few days later that he did what he was instructed, namely, pull out the piece of paper that had been crumpled up. My opponent was then successful in winning the last position on the executive. I will not name him because I do not want to embarrass "the fox", but he did not get where he is today by being slow.

Another issue that I thought was important when we were in Opposition was the issue of parliamentary committees. We did not have much, if anything, of a parliamentary committee system. Towards the end of the National Party Government we did get a Public Accounts Committee and, I think, a Public Works Committee, although they were somewhat limited in the sense that they also provided for a Minister to have a veto on the committee investigating anything, which does seem to be an unfortunate limitation.

Let me come to Government and talk about some of the issues in Government. I suppose the big issue that dominated the 1989 election was the need to reform Queensland. I come from a very Labor background, but I think one of the things that brought me into politics, and into State politics, was that I did not like the sort of community, the sort of society, that we had become in the 1970s and 1980s. I think one of the things that Queensland has suffered from is that we have had too long a period of one party being in power: the Labor Party up until 1957 and then the coalition up until 1989. That is not healthy. You need turnover. Whether you think that it should be every three years or every nine years, or whatever, you need turnover—you need new people, new energy, new ideas. Queensland had not had that and we had suffered as a consequence. So there was a big job to be done in terms of reforming the State, not just the Police Service, which had some serious problems as revealed in the Fitzgerald inquiry, but accountability of Government, the Parliament, the electoral laws and, of course, the public sector. The public sector was not really dealt with directly in the Fitzgerald inquiry but there was a lot to be done there.

Let me take briefly the various elements of the reform process. Firstly, EARC—the Electoral and Administrative Review Commission—was clearly the most successful and the most professional of the three commissions that were established by the new Government. It undertook a wide range of tasks and it set about those tasks with the object of putting itself out of a job. Under Tom Sherman and then David Solomon, it went about these tasks in a very professional and deliberate way. I was very impressed with the work they did. We did not always agree with the results, but it was a very valuable process not just for the Government but also for the Opposition and I think the whole community. Certainly, there was a new element introduced into public life in Queensland at that time and that was consultation. Sometimes I used to get a bit frustrated with the amount of consultation that went on but I think that, after what had gone before, it was needed.

I will just mention a couple of items. The one that I am proudest of personally in terms of my time in politics is the reform of the electoral laws. As most of you probably know, it was the Labor Party that instituted the gerrymander and Joh Bjelke-Petersen refined it into an art form. It does not matter who did it: it was wrong, because it takes away from each and every one of you and each and every Queenslander the right to elect a Government that reflects the popular will. It was a great source of satisfaction and pride to me at the end of that process that we had all three party leaders come out and say, "These electoral laws are fair; these electoral boundaries are fair", because the commissioners had been selected by all three parties. I think that was very important in terms of trying to restore some of the public confidence and trust that had been lost in the Government, in the Parliament and in public life in this State. It was not a Labor thing; it is something that we all had a responsibility to do.

There were a range of other accountability measures, from freedom of information, judicial review of administrative decisions and giving the people the right to march, which they exercised most unreasonably during the time of my Government. I had really implemented that particular reform so that it would be in place for when we went out of power. But there you go, people can be so ungrateful sometimes!

The Criminal Justice Commission was the other commission. It got a lot more publicity and, in a way, it set about getting a lot more publicity. It did some very good work, but it also did some very poor work. I had a problem with the chairman and I did not realise it. Sir Max Bingham took offence at a couple things I said. One of those was when I criticised the poker machine report that they brought out. I did so on the basis that they had damned a number of companies and people without putting the propositions or the allegations to them. They just published it. Of course, they have privilege and I made the comment that, under the rules of natural justice or procedural fairness, this was just wrong. Anyway, this was greatly resented out at Toowong, apparently, and it was one of a number of issues in respect of which I would pay a price later on.

The point is, though, that commissions such as EARC and CJC, which are standing royal commissions and have very extensive powers over members of the community, have a responsibility to exercise those powers in a sober way. They have a responsibility not to play politics, not to leak against the Government of the day. I am not just talking about our Government, there have been problems since we went out of office. I am not going to get into the rights and wrongs of every issue as between the Government of the day and the Criminal Justice Commission, but the consequence of that is that if a commission such as that, with its incredible powers, does a good job but it also does some things very poorly and then it plays favourites with some people in the media and plays politics, then eventually that catches up with you. The Criminal Justice Commission does not have anywhere near the public support today that it had originally. That is not all its own fault, but it has to bear some of the responsibility for that.

As to the reform of the public sector, in my view it had been left unattended for 32 years, some people would say even longer. We published a detailed program for reform of the Public Service before the election—I think that was August before the December election. I remember doing so at one of three fora that were organised out at Griffith University for each of the three leaders. I remember a wide range of people, including the respective union leaders, all jumping up and applauding at the end. I thought, "This seems pretty good." Of course, when you get into Government promising to reform institutions and the way in which Government is carried on, you find everybody supports you, except when you come to knock on their door they say, "No, not me, go next door", because people do not like change.

There was criticism from some people at the time that we did too much too fast in relation to the Public Service reform. Some of you may recall that we reduced 27 Government departments down to 18; we changed the number of directors-general and we restructured the departments in terms of the roles they played to make them more rational in terms of their responsibilities. In other words, no more Lands, Forestry and Police, and some of those other odd portfolios. A lot of people resented the change. There were reasons for that. I think most of the changes were necessary and appropriate. They were a part of modernising the Queensland public sector. They also introduced a number of things that had happened in other jurisdictions and were overdue to happen in Queensland.

Part of the problem, however, was that perhaps too many things were done over too short a time. I remember one day going down to the Titles Office, or whatever it is now called. I decided to buy a small block of land. I thought, "I will see if I can remember how the conveyancing system works." So I went down to the Titles Office. You go to one counter and you buy this little ticket for \$5 or whatever and you go over to another counter where you give it to a person and they go away and get this dusty old book that is about this big with all the deeds and maps in it and they bring that out. As the clerk went away to get the book, I looked on to the wall next to his desk and it had a photocopied photograph of Clint Eastwood from that Dirty Harry movie with a great big gun barrel pointing out. It had on the photocopy, "Go on, Mr Goss" and underneath, "Just make one more change." I thought, "Perhaps the change process—the reform process—has not been such a great success; it has not been so well received at the lower levels of the Public Service." So I went off to have a chat to Peter Coaldrake.

There will always be a debate about whether we did too much too fast; or whether we did too little too slowly. In my view, there was a big job to be done and it had to be done. When you do a job like that, there will be mistakes; that is unavoidable. There were other problems, too, and that is that in some departments you had middle managers who did not like change. They liked the way they had been doing things for a long time so they frustrated the process of change. That is something that you have just got to put up with.

I found economic development to be a very interesting and challenging area, especially as we came into Government at a time of a very serious recession and very high levels of unemployment. But we undertook a number of projects. One of those was the Carpentaria/ Mount Isa Minerals Province. I will just mention that because I looked at that area of the State—and there is an area up there which is

equivalent to the size of France; a number of prospective mines there—but the process was that each mine would be handled by the Government as it came along. Sometimes it would be bounced backwards and forwards from the Department of Mines to the Premier's Department, to Treasury, to the Environment Department, to the Lands Department and to the Transport Department. Each department would have a reason for not processing its part in the chain because the other department had not done this and on and on it went endlessly. So what we decided to do was that, instead of treating each mine separately, we would deal with the region as a region and we would cooperatively and proactively tackle all of the issues that affected the region and affected potential economic development, whether they be transport, energy, infrastructure, environment, native title or whatever. We pulled in each of the six major mining companies, the Federal Government and the Northern Territory Government and worked together. A number of those mines were opened earlier as a result of that proactive effort. I was very pleased to see a few months ago the current Premier open the gas pipeline, because years of work went into getting gas up from south-west Queensland to north-west Queensland and that will have far-reaching benefits into the future.

Let me sort of lurch from one end of the spectrum to the other, and to the arts. In the first term of our Government, I was Minister for the Arts. I gave up the Arts portfolio after the first term and gave it to Dean Wells because the politics of the arts community were worse than the politics of the Labor Party. But it was fun to be there for a short time—a bit like a roller-coaster: get on, have fun, but get off and do not have another ride. Some of the things I was very proud to establish were the Brisbane International Film Festival—we did not have a film festival, we have now got one, and it is often very good; the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, which is a great success, and I think an important part of integrating ourselves into the Asia-Pacific; and the Brisbane Biennial which was also a great success. It has been dismantled now, because there are a number of areas where the current Government has a policy of, basically, dismantling anything we mantled. We mantled it, so they dismantled it and it is not there any more. There is instead something called a Brisbane Festival, which I am sure will be very good but it is fundamentally different from a fine music festival, which is distinctive as opposed to something which may well be good.

Let me mention one other area that I took an interest in, and that is film and television production. I found myself as Arts Minister that we had all of these great studios down the coast that Sir Joh and Dino De Laurentiis had built, but there was not much happening there. So on my first trip overseas to reassure people that, after a change of Government, we would not be nationalising their assets and seizing their eldest children, I ended up in Los Angeles on the way home, pretty gaga because I had been in about 10 towns in Europe and the United States in about 12 days. I went to talk to the head of Paramount Television Production in Los Angeles. I talked to him and made what I thought was a pretty persuasive pitch to do more production in Queensland. He said, "Look, you have got a very good story to tell, but the problem is not with Queensland, it is with your Australian content rules." I said, "What is the problem?" He said, "Look, I will take you across the lot in a minute. We are doing a series"—I forget what it was; one of those space ones, *Lost in Space* or *Found in Space*, or whatever—"and you tell me how I get Eddie the Kangaroo into a story about outer space." He went on to describe the film and television production business in this way: "Look, art is art and business is business, and what we do ain't art." And it was not, but his point was that it was just a business and they needed to run it in a businesslike way.

In terms of the role of Government and the positive role that public policy has to play in our community, let me make a few comments. We are about to go into an election campaign. I am not sure what the dominant issues in that will be—I suppose, health, crime, native title, wharves, or whatever. One of the things that I found very satisfying about getting into Government, and I think anybody who has the opportunity to get into Government, particularly into the Ministry, finds that if you apply yourself in a positive and diligent way, there is so much that can be achieved to transform a community or to make changes that benefit people. I spoke before about electoral laws; I think that they are absolutely fundamental in terms of the performance of Government and democracy. Big changes were made in education—not just the big boost to spending but things like the Asian languages and studies program, the most comprehensive of any Australian State, and the rewrite of the curriculum. These are things that are very important. In health, once again, a big boost to funding but, at the micro end of the scale, the Health Rights Commission so that people had a capacity to complain and to be heard and to perhaps get redress. In the environment, to double the national park estate and to place Fraser Island on the World Heritage List. These and many of the other things I spoke about are lasting legacies for the whole community.

While we can be proud of that in terms of our achievement as politicians on both sides of the Parliament, it is something that the whole State can be proud of because I think that there was a

momentum—there was a desire—for many of these changes. I think, in many respects, Queensland was made respectable again. We reconnected with the rest of Australia. In housing, I grew up in an area that was a suburb built on public housing after the Second World War—a pretty drab sort of place. I was aware, I think at a fairly early stage, of two problems with public housing: one that there was not enough of it, and two, the quality was not good enough. To have box after box after box after box identical except for a different colour of peeling paint is not a great environment in which to build any sense of community. So it was very satisfying, therefore, to not only increase the stock of public housing but also to undertake a number of reforms in terms of the quality of public housing. I will perhaps sum that up by saying that the big increases in spending in a number of key social areas were also achieved on the basis that there was a balanced Budget; taxes were kept in control, the debt was kept in control, and there was a full funding of all of the State's future liabilities, particularly superannuation and so on.

In the weeks or perhaps months ahead, we will have an election campaign. I just hope that we will get more of a contest of ideas and policies than we have had in recent times. I hope that the media will pay a bit more attention to the policy detail than to the fluff and entertainment, sometimes called election wallpaper, because the public has a right to that. I know the media has pressure, I know journalists have pressure to get circulation, to get ratings, but an election and the future of the State—the future of the country, for that matter—is more important than that. I think we need to tip the balance back a bit towards the substance of politics and the substance of the contest of ideas.

As for Parliament, there is a lot I can say about Parliament. I will just make two comments. It is good to see that we have finally got a system of parliamentary committees that are functioning pretty well—certainly functioning better all the time. I think that it takes a while for a parliamentary committee system to get up and running, but it is up and running. So that is a positive. A negative is that Parliament is now televised. I have to take some responsibility for that. I know the Speaker of the Parliament is entirely independent, but one of the last things I did before leaving Government was to make sure that he had the money to televise the Parliament and to make that announcement, which he did because, as he will tell you, he was a great reforming Speaker.

So we now have televising of State Parliament. What does it add to the public debate? I think, unfortunately, very little, because normally what you get on television is the clash, particularly if there is a bit of abuse either way. They show one side's abuse and the other side's retaliation. What does it add to the public debate? Nothing! What it does do is add to the public cynicism about what politicians are doing with taxpayers' money. I think they think that is what we do all day. We do not do that all day, because it would be much too exhausting; we just do it for the first hour. So I am not sure that television is a success. I was always opposed to it. I did, in fact, agree before—I think it was a year or so before we went out of Government—to bring in televising of Parliament because most people seemed to agree with it and, ultimately, you have to respond to that, particularly when that is the trend around the country. But it was not something that I agree with and I do not think that it has added much to the quality of democracy. I think that that time of Parliament, question time, is an important part of the philosophical and psychological battle that goes on in politics. People watching it in their lounge rooms for 20 seconds or so are not going to understand that. Not being part of the political process, they do not understand what is going on. So they get a different impression, and that is not a positive one.

The last point that I will make is to give you an anecdote that matches my Gold Coast Bulletin's "Gold Coast is the crime capital of the southern hemisphere" anecdote and to show just how much I have learned and matured as a politician. After I announced a couple of months ago that I was getting out of Parliament and moving on to another world, I received offers from all sorts of people—from the sublime to the ridiculous. One of those was from Channel 9's Hooked on Water fishing program. I know nothing about fishing. I am very big in terms of being a wholehearted supporter of the fishing industry: I consume a lot of seafood. But as for the preliminaries, I am not too interested.

I have been fishing twice: once as a kid with my father where in the course of two hours we caught nothing and I thought that was pretty boring; then about 10 years later I went fishing with a couple of mates at Hervey Bay when the whiting were running, skipping, hopping or jumping or whatever they do in Hervey Bay, and we caught a couple of hundred, and I thought that was pretty dull. So at that point I decided that fishing was not for me. I said to the producer, "Look, I am not really a fishing person." She said, "That's okay." I said, "Look, it is worse than that. I actually find fishing really boring. I do not think that I should come on your program. I just do not think that it is right." She said, "That's okay. We would love to have you on the program." I said, "What would I do?" She said, "Look, you can do anything from fly-fishing on the Bloggs River to marlin fishing in the ocean." I thought, "Marlin fishing in the ocean?" I thought, "You've got to do that once", and I said, "All right, we will do that." I said, "I am not a good sailor so tell me what tablets to get and I will be there."

So a couple of months later, I turned up at some pier at Scarborough and we set off for an hour and a half out to somewhere called the Moreton Trench, or the Bribie Trench. There we trawled up and down for about an hour and then, finally, a bite. It was not a marlin. In fact, it turned out to be a sailfish about four to five foot long, 40 or 50 kilos with this great sail like this—a most impressive catch. It took me about 10 to 15 minutes to reel it in—very satisfying, you could feel it all the way from the biceps to the shoulder blades. Then about an hour later we caught another one. In fact, we caught two. So I took one and Phippsy, the Channel 9 presenter, took the other one. They took half an hour to get in but, once again, it was very satisfying. You had to fight—the call of the wild, or whatever it is you do out there in the Moreton Trench. We got them in and took the photographs. Since then, people pass me in the street and at the football—the Broncos the other day—and say, "Good fishing, Wayne", and I give them the thumbs-up sign.

You see, what I have learned is that I do not tell them that the deckhand put out six lines; he put the bait on them; we sat down inside the cabin, had a cup of tea and a sandwich; that after about an hour the fish jumped on to the line, or whatever they do; the deckhand then makes sure that the fish is hooked, then hands me the rod, gets the other five rods in out of the way so that you do not get the lines caught up; and then when the fish finally gets to the boat, he pulls it in because he has gloves on his hands; he lifts it up so you can hold it and they take a photograph of it. This process was repeated when we caught the two. So I have learned a lot: I have learned that public relations is important. People enjoy the public relations and it is not my responsibility to take that away from them. Thank you.