

Annual Release of Cabinet Minutes
Background to the 1976 Cabinet Minutes
by Dr David Solomon AM

The *Courier-Mail* treated it as the biggest local story of the year. On 16 November the headline across the whole of the front page was 'SHOCKS AS POLICE CHIEF QUILTS'. There were dot points: 'Whitrod to go in two weeks'; 'Inquiry on Police Force procedure'; '48-year-old may be new Commissioner'; 'Cabinet names 35 in major reshuffle'. Throughout the year the newspaper had carried many major stories about the Police Service, including complaints about a police raid on hippies at Cedar Bay and the breaking up of a university students demonstration. It also reported extensively on the lengthy trial of three men – one a serving police officer and another a recently retired policeman – on corruption charges. That trial, which ended early in November with the acquittal of all three, had been used by the Premier as a reason for not proceeding with an inquiry into police graft, malpractice and corruption that he had promised the previous year. But the inquiry to which Cabinet agreed on the day Ray Whitrod quit was different. The newspaper report quoted the Premier as saying the corruption allegations had been looked at in the court case and he knew of no corruption. The newspaper also reported the man tipped to succeed Whitrod was 48-year-old Inspector Terry Lewis, who Cabinet had promoted to Assistant Commissioner, against Whitrod's advice. [See also the Fitzgerald Report (1989) and Colin Hughes (1980) *The Government of Queensland* UQP 167-171]

Complaints by police over the Police Commissioner's leadership and policies had prompted the Premier to move Allen Maxwell Hodges from the Police portfolio and make him Minister for Tourism and Marine Services, swapping portfolios with Thomas Newbery. The Premier made these changes when a Cabinet reshuffle was required after the unscheduled resignation of the Liberal Leader, Sir Gordon Chalk. William Knox succeeded Sir Gordon as Liberal Leader, Deputy Premier and Treasurer.

The State election in 1974 had given the Coalition a massive majority, with 69 of the 82 seats. The National Party had 39 seats, the Liberals 30, Labor held 11, while there were 2 independents. During 1976 significant differences between the Coalition partners became evident. For example, the Liberals initially opposed the Premier's policy of abolishing death duties, and that became an issue in the by-election in the safe Liberal seat of Clayfield (contested by the National Party as well as by the ALP). The *Courier-Mail* reported on 5 June that disunity was so much of a problem that the Nationals and Liberals could not even agree on a date for a joint meeting to discuss Coalition disunity. Later in June the Nationals rejected a proposal for amalgamation of the two parties. (*Courier-Mail* 26 June) The new Liberal Leader Mr Knox suggested the parties would eventually amalgamate but it could take 10 to 15 years. (*Courier-Mail* 8 August). The Liberal Party voted to oppose the Nationals in selected seats. (*Courier-Mail* 3 October) The Government managed to manufacture problems within Labor ranks by giving a knighthood to Sir Jack Egerton, President of the Trades and Labor Council, and a powerful figure within the ALP. He was sacked from all his Labor positions.

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Strikes were a major issue for Cabinet and for the Joint Government Parties, which developed a series of initiatives designed to force Cabinet to take a stronger line against trade unions. Throughout Australia in 1976 almost 3.8 million days were lost in strikes, the second worst on record. In Queensland 426,000 days were lost, involving 317,000 workers and lost wages of almost \$13.6 million. More than a third of the strikes were the result of protests in June and July over the Federal Government's decision to scrap most of the Medibank scheme introduced by Labor in 1975.

Relations between the Queensland Government and the Federal Government were not as hostile as they had been when the Whitlam Government was in office. However the Queensland Government was appalled to find that the new Fraser Government intended to implement some of the policies developed by its predecessor, such as introducing land rights for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, banning mining on Fraser Island and retaining a federal interest in environmental protection.

During the early part of the year the Brisbane City Council discovered that its bid to host the Commonwealth Games in 1982 would be successful, because bids from other cities had been withdrawn. After this decision was confirmed the Cabinet began to consider –without much enthusiasm – what role the State Government would play in planning and providing facilities. In June it was reported there was a possibility that Brisbane might also stage Expo 88, leading to the redevelopment of South bank. (*Courier-Mail* 27 June)

In 1976 Queensland's population reached 2,092,400, of whom 985,920 lived in Brisbane. The State weekly basic wage was \$61.70 for men and \$48.10 for women, with additional allowances for people working outside the southeast corner of the State, up to a maximum of \$3.25 in the northwest. The minimum Federal award was \$91.30 a week. Average male weekly earnings in Queensland were \$189.80.

In April the Licensing Court accepted a tender for a hotel on the Gold Coast Highway at Mermaid Beach, the first hotel to be built on the coast since the Chevron at Surfers Paradise, 20 years earlier. Brisbane's Riverside Expressway was opened on 22 July. There were long queues at the Family Court registry to greet the commencement of no-fault divorce when the Family Law Act 1975 came into effect in January. The Medical Journal of Australia warned that cigarettes could be a risk for non-smokers. Vince Gair, recalled from Ireland where the Whitlam Government had appointed him as Ambassador, said minor parties in Australia had no future. And the assistant professional at Royal Queensland Golf Club, 21-year old Greg Norman, won his first tournament, the \$7000 Westlakes Classic in Adelaide, playing in only his fourth 72-hole tournament since turning professional 16 months earlier.