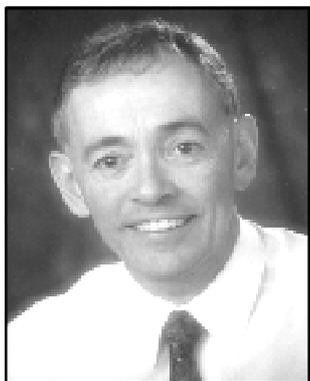


double standards regarding employment. One the one hand, we praise young people who undertake volunteer work. On the other hand, we hold in high regard those who have found employment. Yet woe betide anyone who offers or accepts any arrangement in between. It is a 'no-go' area—although it is self-evidently a fertile field for mutually acceptable and agreeable arrangements between the parties.

It is inconceivable that the present system, with all its inflexibilities, will be allowed to continue indefinitely to exclude so many of our young people from the world of work. Not even the most relentless demonization of the motives of small business employers could achieve that end. The struggle for liberalization of the existing wage regime has echoes of the campaign against slavery, invoking Ernst Howe's description of it as a 'bitter conflict with contemporary sentiment and the interests of gigantic power'. Liberty. Freedom. The long struggle to break the shackles of workplace regulation goes on.

#### NOTES

- 1 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'So, Back to the Quack Remedies for Jobs', page 15, 29 October 1998.
- 2 *The 7.30 Report*, 28 February 1997.
- 3 *Checkpoint Charlie*, a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Youth Unemployment, 1997.
- 4 *Sexton Report*, 1997.



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I P A

# Opinion Polls and Baseball Bats

## What Really Went on in the Queensland State Election

CHRIS MITCHELL

**I**T should tell astute observers much about the divided nature of modern Australia that most of the commentaries about the rise of One Nation and, indeed, almost all the latest tome on the subject (*Two Nations*) have been written by people outside of Queensland—the birthplace of One Nation.

Apart from Nick Rothwell and a couple of other grown-ups, the commentators have almost all got it wrong.

Conservative protest politics has a long history in Queensland. Remember the Labor Split, the Confederate Action Party, the CEC? The interaction of such politics plus an optional preferential voting system with an electorate just as disenchanted with John Howard as it was with Paul Keating, which still had (to quote Wayne Goss) its baseball bat in hand and which saw the 'unread head' Mrs Hanson as an underdog, was always bound to deliver a large amount of support to One Nation, even though most people knew they were voting out of protest.

But what really sealed the June 13 Queensland State election were the campaigns of the governing Coalition parties and the Labor opposition.

The entire thrust of the Government's campaign was negative, with a plea for One Nation preferences. The Borbidge National/Liberal Coalition Government had already accepted—because of its own internal research and the feedback from the wiser heads in the Government—that One Nation had been on a roll since the previous October.

In private conversations, with people as high up as Premier Borbidge himself, many in the Coalition expressed concern at the negativity of the Coali-

tion's campaigning. They felt that theirs had been a service delivery government, with a good record on hospitals and road building and that those messages had been lost in the campaign. They felt the campaign was giving their own base voters permission to lodge a protest so long as they channelled their vote back to the conservatives via their optional second preferences. And once the Liberal Party opted to preference One Nation, small-'l' Libs in Brisbane were always going to repeat their 1989 desertion of the conservatives.

For its part, Labor focused almost entirely on the one line—it was either a stable Beattie government or a rag-tag Coalition government relying on One Nation support. Mr Beattie was on-message throughout the campaign. He spoke of a five per cent unemployment target—which was an intentional dry run for Kim Beazley's subsequent five per cent campaign—and constantly referred to the 'rag-tag Coalition'. Observers of politics in Brisbane will have heard this phrase thousands of times in the two months leading up to the election.

But, beyond that, both sides of politics had internal polling several months ahead of the election showing One Nation at near 30 per cent throughout Central Queensland.

After Premier Borbidge sacked Trevor Perrett—his then Minister for Resources and Primary Industry—for his admission to *The Courier-Mail* that he had carried on a relationship with a murdered prostitute, *The Courier-Mail* polled his seat of Barambah four-and-a-half months before the State election. That poll showed One Nation's Dorothy Pratt at 28 per cent. *The Cou-*

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rier-Mail was subsequently leaked internal Labor polling which showed One Nation at near 30 per cent in Wide Bay.

For this reason, the paper decided against State-wide polling in the lead-up to the June 13 election, and concentrated on marginal polling. All up, we published 18 marginal polls and all those in the eventually successful One Nation areas were showing votes of near 30 per cent in the lead-up to the election.

When Premier Borbidge called the election, One Nation's aggregate vote in key marginal seats was 16 per cent, according to internal political tracking polls. The last tracking polls the ALP undertook—on the nights of June 10, 11 and 12—put support for the fledgling party at 18 per cent.

Labor's track illustrates that One Nation's vote was very steady throughout the 26-day campaign, peaking at 20 per cent at the beginning of June and reaching a low point of 14 per cent during the first half of the final week. The polling day jump of One Nation's vote—which rose five points to 23 per cent—was entirely at the expense of the other minor parties—the Greens and the Australian Democrats. The ALP and the Coalition held their final track support on the day. This suggests that, in the last hours, a group of protest voters decided to 'get with the strength' and vote for a real protest party—One Nation—and not a pale imitation. But the point of this polling is that the campaign itself hardly moved One Nation's vote, making a mockery of claims that it was a media-driven phenomenon that saw voters reacting to published poll results.

The One Nation vote recorded by the parties and by news organizations during the campaign was not significantly different from polling undertaken up to nine months before the campaign.

There were some interesting lessons in the final results.

Firstly, metropolitan Brisbane rejected One Nation out of hand. This is largely because metropolitan Brisbane—which is *The Courier-Mail's* major circulation catchment area—had a pretty good idea of exactly what was going on in the State. Those areas outside our catchment area probably did not expect the level of One Nation success eventually achieved. Our editorial writer, Dennis Atkins, former Press Secretary to Wayne Goss, predicted eight One Nation seats. Lord

Mayor Jim Soorley predicted nine a fortnight before the election. A former National Party State Secretary thought One Nation would score in double figures and told me so. There is no substitute for on-the-ground knowledge. Those people who picked the result best were those who'd spent most time actually looking at what was happening in the provincial electorates of Queensland. State-wide polling was useless—because of the very diverse, regionalized nature of the State.

Second, negative advertising has its limits in a compulsory voting system. The exclusively negative advertising of the Coalition played into One Nation's

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hands. After a single introductory positive commercial, every advertisement the Coalition team put together was an attack—even their single 'issues' ad on law and order was negative against themselves. In the United States, negative advertising is used to drive voters away from the polls; to push down your opponent's numbers in a voluntary voting system. Australia's compulsory voting system means negative advertising often sends the cynical to the 'non-political' candidates, whether they are Greens, Democrats or One Nation. During June, Mr Borbidge, unable to balance the competing demands of his natural constituency (which was breaking off in large lumps) and swinging voters (who were offended by the brazen politicking on preferences) was rattled in his often strident political tone as he pushed One Nation's hot buttons.

Labor played a high stakes game—and actually lost more seats to One Nation than did the conservatives—but still managed to hang on with the support of Independent Peter Wellington. It was risky politics indeed, and it depended on minimizing losses in provincial Queensland and maximizing gains in Brisbane.

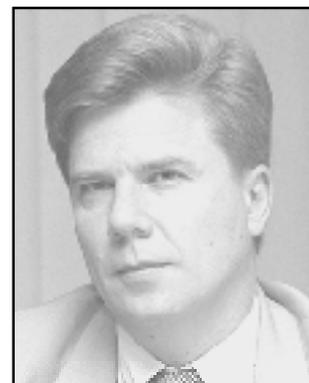
There was undoubtedly an element of anti-media sentiment in the vote for Mrs Hanson's Party. The problem is, many of the commentators who have observed this anti-media sentiment have not really paid attention to how the Queensland media handled Mrs Hanson. They are more familiar with how their own newspapers, radio and television stations treated the One Nation phenomena.

*The Courier-Mail* tried to address the questions of Hansonism in a rational fashion.

We appealed to Queenslanders to consider the open nature of the Queensland economy, its dependence on services and exports and the benefits that its interaction with the region had had on the Queensland growth rate. We pointed out regularly that we had benefited more than the other States from reductions in tariff barriers and from trade with Japan.

Unfortunately, a fairly misguided anti-racist campaign driven by Mrs Hanson's political opponents played into the hands of people who saw her as articulating their concerns. Undoubtedly, fringe racist elements had attached themselves to One Nation. But, whereas *The Courier-Mail* and the *Australia-Israel Review* actually set about trying to expose those elements, many in the national media were more content to put their hand firmly on their heart and profess that they were indeed better than those displaced Australians who were resorting to the baseball bat of Hansonism.

How sad that so many Australians were held in such contempt by their fellows.



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