

The Gravy Train Ride

[Nanny State](#) | [Alan Moran](#)

Herald Sun 31st May, 2000

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No critic can deny the Bracks Government strong marks in its first 200 days. It has hastened slowly on the issues like the Snowy water while making sympathetic noises. It has offered no comfort to the Save Albert park wowers. Above all, it has brought down a budget worthy of the State's best ever Treasurer, Alan Stockdale.

And in the budget, it produced a surplus while sterilising one billion dollars in the Infrastructure Reserve. Though this may turn out to be a re-election slush fund, the appointment of Lynn Kosky as Finance Minister (by all accounts a hard nosed value-for-money taskmaster) offers the prospect of taxpayer benefit.

Some disturbing trends are however emerging. The ban on smoking in restaurants is a typical 'nanny state' action. It forces people to do what the political elite thinks is good for them. Similarly, the knee jerk reduction in speed limits on urban roads does not appear to have been taken with the benefit of a Regulation Impact Statement, which used to be an insurance against superficially attractive measures that turn out to be rotten. And if moving from 60 kph to 50 saves lives (surely not 200 as some have suggested) then why not save more by moving to 40 or more still by moving to 30?

But it is in the company Labor Governments keep that have traditionally brought their downfall. It was Paul Keating who noted that whenever Labor got elected to Government a whole set of people, with claims to have provided assistance, fell out of trees into lucrative taxpayer funded jobs.

The Bracks Government seems to be infected with this traditional Labor malady. Its appointments of aiders and abettors and just plain sympathisers is already causing raised eyebrows. While some like Bernie Fraser (the new head of the Superannuation Office) are well credentialled, and others like Tom Hogg have long experience, their appointments do not pass the probity test that the former Kennett Government had established. They are clearly being rewarded as Labor mates.

Moreover, still other appointments are more blatant examples of political patronage. These include public funding for some of Joan's boys:

- * former planning minister Evan Walker received a handsome fee for his opinion on the City Square shards,
- * former industrial relations minister Neil Pope was well rewarded for his failed attempted arbitration of the Yallourn Power dispute,
- * and ex Cain staffer Terry Moran has been brought in to run the Premiers Department.

These are only the most visible parts of the ice berg of panels, commissions and inquiries which are being staffed by political has-beens and activists. These include ALP stalwart Lyndsay Connors appointed to chair a commission reviewing public education, and Jack Keating a former Victorian Teachers Association radical, appointed a member of the post-compulsory education review.

Moreover, we have yet to see the full extent of spoils being claimed by those who offered copious funding and helpers for the Bracks accession. The teachers union, in particular will surely extract more of the favours that government can make available. And those favours can cost us plenty in wage increases and/or a denial of access to information that will allow schools to be compared with each other.

Premier Bracks spent his university days watching social radicals cause the Whitlam Government's

fall from grace. He will surely have to remain alert to ensuring his government does not suffer a similar fate. He might well have the big picture budget matters under control but he remains vulnerable in the host of appointments and minor decisions that can eat into such solid foundations.

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