

QUEENSLAND COUNCIL FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT, STEPHEN KEIM

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, THURSDAY 24 NOVEMBER 1988

A MINI RETROSPECTIVE

My presidency commenced in the throes of the controversy of the black hole detention unit at Brisbane Prison. This issue led eventually to the Kennedy Report. The report and the Government's commitment to it raises hopes for pronounced improvements in conditions in Queensland prisons but recent events, including assaults on prisoners of extreme severity, indicate that the problems are not yet solved but that there is hope for the future.

Another area for hope involves Government proposals to introduce mandatory video and audio taping of police interviews with suspects. The Government's acceptance of this principle is a great advance, but it is not clear yet whether the Government really understands what is necessary to make sure that the proposal is effective.

The shadow cast by the Fitzgerald Inquiry became darker and more extensive during the last 12 months. Wide ranging and open inquiries do raise very difficult problems for civil libertarians. However, the Council has supported the setting up and continuation of the Inquiry on the basis that the public benefit of addressing grave doubts as to the law enforcement process justifies very real disadvantages that individuals subjected to the Inquiry have suffered. The Council's criticisms of the actual conduct of the Inquiry have been minimal.

Homosexual Law reform is an issue which the Council will press over the next 12 months. The continuation of consensual sodomy as a criminal offence is something which should have ceased in Queensland a long time ago. The Council continues to receive reports of harassment of homosexuals at various places in Brisbane. Many of these reports involve police acting as agents provocateurs seeking advances from homosexuals and then arresting those who make the advance. At the Transit Centre the authorities continued to allow the existence of large holes in shower walls to encourage and spy upon possible homosexual behaviour. This is a scandal which has not been at all addressed by either the administration of the Police Force or the Government.

The confession by James Finch has perhaps taken some of the heat out of a very serious issue confronting the Government. Publication of a confession by one of the detectives present that Finch was, in fact, verbed, raises very difficult problems for the Queensland police Force. The effect of that confession by one of the detectives present is that the Acting Police Commissioner was a party to fabrication of evidence and subsequent giving of false evidence in Court. While that remains unresolved, no member of the public can have any hope that young police officers will feel any duty to respect the role of the Courts in deciding matters of guilt and innocence. This issue must be addressed in the near future.

FINANCE

The Council's excess of expenditure over income last financial year is of some concern. Currently, I try to gain publicity for the Council in the most cost effective manner. Often, a phone call followed by the faxing or posting of a document is more cost effective than broad use of public telex facilities. The exceptional circumstances associated with the detention unit controversy at the end of last year caused a great deal of expenditure.

There is a continuing need for people in the Council who can devote time to planning and organising a number of successful fundraisers. There is also a need for all opportunities to be taken to increase the membership of the Council.

If one looks at the public support that the Council has right across Queensland then our membership potential is probably well into the tens of thousands. It is important that every opportunity be taken to increase the membership through on-going contact that executive members have with the public. The general membership can also seek to enrol friends and acquaintances. These issues must be urgently addressed over the next 12 months.

ADMINISTRATION

Over the last 3 or 4 years, the Council has made progress with its administration. Anne-Louise McCawley and her predecessors have worked hard to get membership records into more order and the use of computer facilities has also assisted in this regard. A recent second reminder to unfinancial members resulted in a large number of renewals.

NEWSLETTERS & GENERAL MEETINGS

Both of these areas require attention over the next 12 months. Peter Murphy, one of the Newsletter Editors for the last year, is addressing the sorts of problems that need to be solved to ensure that we have a regular and presentable Newsletter. The Newsletter is one of the few regular services provided to our general membership and as such is particularly important. There is an urgent need for a couple of people to spend most of their contribution to the Council in assisting Peter.

In the same way the organisation of general meetings has been ad hoc and irregular. There is a need for perhaps one member of the executive to devote most of his or her time soliciting ideas and turning those ideas into interesting general meetings at least 4 or 5 times a year. There is certainly no shortage of interesting speakers or topics in Queensland. Apart from providing a service to the general membership, these meetings provide an opportunity to really contribute to the social and intellectual debate in Queensland.

CONTACT WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC

The reasonably high media profile of the Council results in it receiving a large number of enquiries and complaints from the general public.

The President and others receive a lot of telephone calls direct. However, the Council still

greatly benefits from Lew Wyvill making his telephone number available as the Council's telephone number. I instituted a system early in the year by which Lew's secretary diverted calls to a roster of Council members. This has taken a lot of work away from the President and is greatly appreciated.

Each member of the roster has a book in which he or she is supposed to record their calls and Lew's secretary also makes some sort of summary of the calls diverted in this way. There is a need early in the next 12 months to monitor that system to ensure that members of the public are having their enquiries answered promptly.

A similar need exists with regard to correspondence. Most of this finds its way to the President's desk and is tending to lie there for longer and longer periods.

I make the suggestion that an ad hoc committee of perhaps the secretary and two other persons take responsibility over the next 12 months for making sure that correspondence is properly dealt with.

CONCLUSIONS & BOUQUETS

Despite the slightly negative note of most of this report, I would not like it thought that the Council has been ineffective over the past 12 months nor that there haven't been many very great contributions by members of the executive and others. I will mention a few and the usual risks apply that I will leave out one or two of the most important.

Terry O'Gorman and Matt Foley provided excellent backup advice. I do not believe that the Council should have only one voice and I would hope to encourage other executive members to take some sort of media profile over the next 12 months.

The Council held a wonderful function early in the year presenting a tribute to Martin Luther King. Vice president Ian Dearden doubled on guitar and Errol O'Neil provided the touch of professional class. The contribution of David Maunsell and his wife Fiona and June Anstee to the success of that function was very marked indeed.

Stephanie Tonkin has soldiered away in the mental health area and although she worked as a committee of one, her "committee" was one of the more effective. Bill Lane and Peter Applegarth also made substantive and substantial contributions, preparing a number of submissions to various levels of Government.

With very little free time at his disposal, Peter Murphy struggled bravely with the Newsletter and should be complimented. Di Soon and Roger Byrom were probably the best meeting attendees of the year and contributed on each and every occasion. I have already mentioned Anne-Louise McCawley. But she deserves an extra mention as does Ian Dearden who, between them, carried the bulk of the administrative load.

There were two further silent partners in this respect. Geoff Woodyatt from Ivor Worrell's office in the accounting area and Kathy Summers who provides the membership list, sticky labels, etc. There are two people who weren't on the executive this year but who I would mention as great supporters of the Council. They are Alma Hartshorn who has been on the executive in the past and David Snelling, who is perhaps one of our best at tenders at general

meetings.

My heartfelt thanks goes out to all of those persons that I have mentioned and to those whom I have inexcusably forgotten. Such contribution as I have made as President to the public debate and to the private welfare of Queenslanders has been very dependant on your assistance.

STEPHEN KEIM, PRESIDENT

Brisbane, 24 November 1988