

## ARE THE AUTHORITARIANS WINNING?

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Four books on American politics and public policy were reviewed in a recent article by Michael Ignatieff in the *New York Review of Books*<sup>1</sup>, under the heading '**Are the Authoritarians Winning?**'.

This is a question which Queenslanders will be invited to answer in the election campaign in January 2015.



'Softer Newman' by Sean Leahy, 18.1.14<sup>2</sup>

The thrust of the four books is that the democratic state is overloaded by social expectations and declining economic capacity. The major problem is the growing economic inequality between states and especially within states and the tendency of many writers, including several of those reviewed in the article, is to accept this as the natural and inevitable cost of overall growth.

As the reviewer, Michael Ignatieff, points out:

The issue is whether authoritarian governance is sustainable in the face of demands by the middle class to be treated like citizens, and whether such governance is capable of dealing with radical shocks like a long-term economic showdown of the kind currently predicted for China. ...

The saving grace of democracy is its adaptability. It depends for its vitality on discontent. Discontent leads to peaceful regime change, and, as regimes change, free societies can discard failed alternatives.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Ignatieff, 'Are the Authoritarians Winning?', *New York Review of Books*, 10.7.14, p.53. Reproduced in the *Australian Financial Review*, 23.7.14.

<sup>2</sup> Cartoon reproduced by kind permission of Sean Leahy.

Queensland has undergone two such regime changes over the years in which I have lived here. The first was in 1989 when Wayne Goss replaced the discredited regime mainly associated with Bjelke-Petersen. The second, more recently, was when Campbell Newman's LNP government took office after 20 years of almost continuous ALP rule.

The electorate will shortly sit in judgment on whether the discontent patently visible in the early phase of the Newman government's period in office has been sustained by the complaints about his incipient authoritarianism, or whether his apparent personality transplant will ensure regime continuity.



**'Everywhere I go people agree mine is the best style of leadership'**  
(reproduced courtesy of cartoonist Alan Moir)<sup>3</sup>

Ignatieff suggests three interrelated explanations for the crisis in the democratic state: systematic tax avoidance by the super-rich and globalized corporations, rising income inequality, and money power in politics.

It is the role of 'money power' which leaps out as a salient issue in the current Queensland election campaign. The deliberate encouragement of massive donations in return for policy and legislative favours has been well-documented without eliciting any apology from those involved.<sup>4</sup> It may now be regarded as a new moral norm by those who favour the uninhibited operation of market forces.

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<sup>3</sup> Alan Moir, *Smile It's Joh's Place*, Penguin Books, 1982.

<sup>4</sup> See Roger and Ann Scott 'Queensland 2014: Political Battleground', TJRyan Foundation Research Report No 14, [http://www.tjryanfoundation.org.au/dbase\\_upl/Queensland\\_2014\\_Political\\_Battleground2.pdf](http://www.tjryanfoundation.org.au/dbase_upl/Queensland_2014_Political_Battleground2.pdf)