

Money Can't Buy Me Love

Roger Scott

Tell me that you want the kind of things
That money just can't buy
I don't care too much for money
Money can't buy me love

Instead of delving into the dusty corners of my political science bookshelf, I listened to the Beatles to ease nervous tension while the result hangs in the balance. They offered profound and insightful commentary on the Queensland election campaign and the attitudes of voters who declined to support the LNP.

Indeed Annastacia – or was it Wayne Swan – might have written the lyric above as the key guiding principle for the whole campaign.

The issue of undisclosed donations, or 'cash for favours', was significant in discussions about the lack of transparency and accountability of the LNP government in the run-up to the election. Whether one of the considerations in the LNP's decision to have a January election was knowing that in early February the *2013-14 Political Funding Disclosure Returns* would be published can only be guessed at. However, when these were published on the Monday after the election, they revealed the huge imbalance in the donations received by the parties, and one of the lies that had been told in the course of the election.

On 3 February the *Courier-Mail* revealed that:

Coal mining giant New Hope has been caught out lying about donations to the Liberal Party, with official records revealing a \$250,000 gift to the federal wing last financial year despite claims to the contrary just last month. ...

The disclosure logs also show a \$250,000 donation to the federal Liberal Party from Ipswich-based New Hope in August 2013.

That's despite the company telling the *Courier-Mail* last month that it had made no donations to the Liberal Party in 2013-14 after Sydney shock-jock Alan Jones claimed there was a link between political donations by the company and a surprise approval of an expansion of the Acland mine on the Darling Downs.¹

¹ 'Parties' financial backers laid bare', *Courier-Mail*, 3.2.15.

'Money can't buy me love'

Five dimensions to the warning about love not being for sale

There were five dimensions to the warning about love not being for sale, to reference a Cole Porter lyric of the jazz age, immortalised by Ella Fitzgerald.²

1 People power

First, there was the cost-effectiveness of the on-the-ground campaigning strategies of meeting real people by knocking on their doors, sitting at desks in shopping centres and meeting them outside pre-polling offices in the weeks before polling day and then welcoming them at polling booths on the day. The best documented example of this phenomenon was in Ashgrove where the ALP candidate resolutely avoided stage-managed events and mobilised an army of locals to assist in direct contact, both face-to-face and over the phone. The several millions of dollars available to the LNP proved futile in the face of 'people power'.

2 Ineffective mass media advertising

Second, there was the cost-ineffectiveness of mass media advertising, even in Murdoch print publications of near-hysterical bias. A large slice of the non-LNP community rely on social media and on-line news sources as an alternative to newspapers and watch videos and advertising-free television provided by the ABC or other on-line options rather than the mainstream commercial channels.

3 Bribing the electorate

Third, there was the cost-ineffectiveness of making conditional promises of constituency-specific largesse, from sport changing sheds in Ipswich to road construction and anything anyone else asked for in Ashgrove.

In retrospect, this strategy had two negative effects. On the one hand, many people living in Ashgrove and other potential high-risk and therefore highly promised constituencies felt slightly ashamed. On the other hand, people in un-marginal seats felt ignored or under-valued, including LNP non-marginals. The further people were from Brisbane, the more they felt alienated and angry - the tourist strips just north and south of Brisbane already felt well looked-after but people further north rapidly reverted to the traditional hostility towards Brisbane which has been part of Queensland culture since federation. Money in this case made them angry and the LNP unloved.

4 Cash for privileged access

Fourth, there was the question of offering access (and, by inference, favourable decisions) in return for money donations. The Newman government changed the rules so that that large amounts could be contributed to them without close and contemporary scrutiny of the sources. There were many examples, publicised throughout the campaign, of coal miners, sand miners, quarriers and CSG operators who had benefitted from weakened oversight arrangements. And more specifically, property developers, casino builders and infrastructure builders were encouraged to trumpet their success on the basis of employment opportunities created as a by-product of their initiatives.

The ALP made one of its few miscalculations here, quietly overturning a policy introduced by Anna Bligh and offering a \$2,500 per head 'forum' at which business representatives could meet the Anastacia Palaszczuk and Bill Shorten. This lost the ALP the high moral ground when it became public midway through the campaign. And they were rightly condemned for this by Tony Fitzgerald

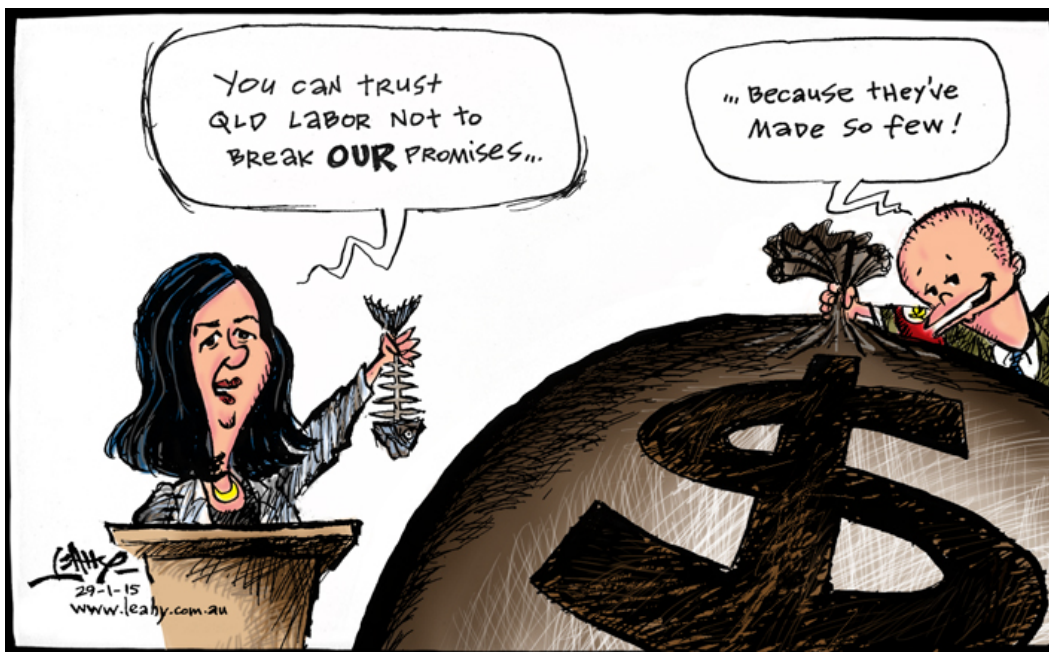
² Cole Porter, *Love for Sale*, 'Who will buy? Who would like to sample my supply? Who's prepared to pay the price, for a trip to paradise? Love for sale'.

QC in a key intervention which was otherwise focused on the decline of accountability under the Newman regime.³

5 Selling the community's assets to the private sector

Finally, there was the macro-level discussions about money in the form of debt repayment and privatisation of assets. The election outcome suggests that most voters were unconvinced that the semantic shift from 'sales' to 'leases' changed very much. The intention under either arrangement was seen as removing an asset owned collectively by the community of taxpayers and offering it to the private sector who by definition would need to extract personal profit to make it worthwhile as an undertaking.

The general proposal linked privatisation to debt-reduction where benefits would be in the longer term and difficult to personalise. But the perceived imperative for offering spending plans for short-term political benefits meant drawing on the same source. Taxpayers were being bribed differentially with their own money.



The Leahy cartoon (29.1.15) portrays the central policy auction with Palaszczuk holding up a fish skeleton while Newman brandishes a vast bag of dollars. This could be read both ways and the outcome suggests that many voters would rather settle for fewer infrastructure dollars in return for keeping their assets.

Here in Queensland, if she becomes the Premier, Anastacia Palaszczuk would be well satisfied with the verdict of an electorate which did care less about money and more about trust and accountability.

Say you don't need no diamond ring and I'll be satisfied.

³ The Hon Tony Fitzgerald AC QC interviewed by Leigh Sales on the *ABC 7.30 Report*: <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2015/s4166259.htm>