

## At least the trains run on time

Queenslanders with a smattering of 20th century European history might have wondered at the Premier's choice of successful accountability measure - put forward after the media had carried reports about the Queensland Audit Office's criticism of the performance indicators used by the government. At least, he said, the government could demonstrate that it had made the trains run on time. Not a well-chosen example for those of us who are concerned about the decline of accountability in the State under the Newman government.

A quick Google search, on Mussolini and trains, threw up an article in the UK paper *The Independent* about Silvio Berlusconi's election win in Italy in 1994:

### **'Making Italy work: Did Mussolini really get the trains running on time?'**

Brian Cathcart's article reads:

"Say what you like about Mussolini, he made the trains run on time". That was the famous last excuse for Fascism, conveying the idea that while dictatorship might not be very nice, at least it got things done.

In 1936 the American journalist George Seldes complained that when his fellow-countrymen returned home from holidays in Italy they seemed to cry in unison: "Great is the Duce<sup>1</sup>; the trains now run on time". And no matter how often they were told about Fascist oppression, injustice and cruelty, they always said the same thing: "But the trains run on time."

"It is true," wrote Seldes, "that the majority of big expresses, those carrying eye-witnessing tourists, are usually put through to time, but on the smaller lines rail and road-bed conditions frequently cause delays." ...

The notion that the trains were running on time was nonetheless vigorously put about by the Fascist propaganda machine. "Official press agents and official philosophers . . . explained to the world that the running of trains was the symbol of the restoration of law and order," wrote Seldes. It helped that foreign correspondents in Rome were very carefully controlled and that the reporting of all railway accidents or delays was banned.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/rear-window-making-italy-work-did-mussolini-really-get-the-trains-running-on-time-1367688.html>

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<sup>1</sup> Mussolini was a self-named man, referring to himself as 'Il Duce' - the leader.