

'REPATRIMONALISATION' AND QUEENSLAND

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Any American political scientist wishing to make an impact beyond a narrow circle invents a new word or challenges the meaning of old ones. Francis Fukuyama did both – using old words in new ways with his 1990's best-seller *The end of history and the last man*¹ and then, more recently creating the word 'repatrimonialisation'. Unexpectedly this new word rings a few bells with an analysis of Queensland political life.

In patrimonial societies – a term of Max Weber from another century – the ruler used family, household and friends to administer the state almost exclusively for their own benefit. In Weber's modern state, the administrators instead were chosen on the basis of merit and expertise and tasked with running the state for the broad public interest. As a review of Fukuyama's latest book puts it:

Modern states succeed patrimonial ones by de-legitimizing the tendency to favour family and friends and instituting civil service examinations, merit qualifications and rules against bribery, corruption and conflicts of interests.²

Fukuyama then argues that many ostensibly modern states are afflicted with what he terms neopatrimonialism:

Each has the outward form of a modern state with a constitution, a legal system and pretensions of impersonality, but the actual operation of government remains at core a matter of sharing resources with family and friends.

He suggests that outwardly modern states have been captured by powerful elites able to mobilise funds to buy influence over decision-makers which sustain high levels of social inequality.

Commenting on the US but his words fit Queensland:

Interest groups are able to effectively buy politicians with campaign contributions and lobbying in a perfectly legal process. This creates 'clientelism' among the practitioners of politics and public administration and a 'vetocracy' which paralyzes governments and administrators from taking any action which inhibits the interest of 'patrons' in the wider public interest.

Fukuyama theorizes that there are three institutions that co-produce political order and that, when in some proper balance, tend to result in prosperous, well-governed liberal democratic regimes:

1. the state and its bureaucratic machinery;
2. the rule of law and its impartial administration; and
3. the public accountability mechanisms generally associated with democratic norms, choices, and elections.

¹ Francis Fukuyama, *The end of history and the last man*, Free Press, 1992.

² J. Dilulio, 'The Rise and Fall of the US Government', *Washington Monthly*, reviewing Fukuyama, *Political Order and Political Decay*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

The reviewer, Dilulio, takes issue with Fukuyama, placing much of the blame on the perversion of bureaucracies by the corruption of finance and out-sourcing, where Fukuyama rails against inability of the public bureaucracies to grow stronger and contain the corruption of other branches of government.:

Fukuyama is correct that America has never had a fully 'centralized, bureaucratic, and autonomous state'; but he is wrong to imply that America needs one. What America does need is a federal public administration workforce that relies less on proxies and more on full-time bureaucrats who are well selected, well trained, well motivated, well rewarded financially, and well respected by one and all.

America's political decay is fed daily by public disdain for public servants and fueled each election season by bovine congresspersons in both parties who score points with voters by bashing 'the bureaucrats' and 'running against Washington'. The first step toward slowing or reversing America's political decay is to recognize how for-profit contractors and other administrative proxies have rigged the system in their own interest, expand the federal civil service, and start treating federal bureaucrats as if our public well-being depended on them—for it does.

Queensland voters are about to be asked whether they too wish to keep a large public service and provider of a range of services in the public interest or whether they accept, as they inadvertently did last time around, that there is more virtue in 'repatrimonialism'.