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**BREAKING**

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News Opinion

OPINION

# Opinion: Justice director-general John Sosso's dismissal is not without precedent and long, bitter memories

EVERY change of administration has been accompanied by a reign of terror but it seems Labor has not mastered the art of removing senior public servants painlessly.

**Terry Sweetman**

 3 min read March 19, 2015 - 10:00PM

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Hon Yvette D'Ath Member for Redcliffe Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister for Training and Skills, arrives at the Executive Building for a cabinet meeting, Brisbane. Photographer: Liam Kidston.

THE guillotine was invented during the French Revolution because the National Assembly wanted a device that would affirm the purpose of capital punishment was solely to end life rather than to inflict pain.

But two years later the Reign of Terror added the constant fear of death to the momentary pain of execution.

It may be of some consolation for those public servants listening for the sound of the tumbrel that, by the end of the Terror, audiences grew bored and stayed away in droves.

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Here in Queensland, the Labor Government seems not to have entirely mastered the art of execution without pain, although it must be conceded there are few precedents for such kindness.

Every change of administration has been accompanied by a reign of terror, although the most painless of all was probably that of the Goss government, which banished the unloved to a gulag of tedium and well-paid thumb-twiddling.

Certainly, the government of Campbell Newman could not claim to have had clean hands or to have worked with surgical

skill when it came to reshaping the public service.



Yvette D'Ath (left) is copping bad press over John Sosso's ill-timed attack when it's unlikely she could have wielded much influence over his behaviour.

Annastacia Palaszczuk's beginning-of-term clean-out is not without pain but it is also confused by a series of fairly bizarre emails.

## Opinion

Don't miss out on the headlines from Opinion. Followed categories will be added to My News.

First we had Director-General of Health Ian Maynard being given his marching orders and then earning ministerial displeasure by sending out a “thank you” email to staff.

Follow

The email did contain a gratuitous pat on the back for the previous government's policies but the nuances were probably lost on most people who thought Health Minister Cameron Dick was being a bit petty whining about "internal processes".

And now we have the curious affair of Justice Department DG John Sosso, who sent a "farewell" email indicating he had been sacked and then followed it up with another saying he was off on endless leave and praising his minister Yvette D'Ath.

I'm open to arguments that the sacking was a bad decision by D'Ath but, for the life of me, I can't see why she is getting such bad press over Sosso's ill-timed attack of the stutters.

Given that he was on the way out, it seems unlikely that D'Ath could have wielded much influence over his behaviour unless she was withholding his share of the tearoom kitty.

Sosso's sacking may have sent a shiver down the public service spine but the manner of his execution was not exceedingly painful.

He was given until the end of the day to clear his desk, which was somewhat more consideration than that received by lesser beings who had their chattels tossed into cardboard boxes and were escorted to the door under the previous regime.

But Sosso could hardly have been surprised by his fate because he sure didn't do a lot to win friends and influence people in the ALP over the decades.

For him, the fruits of high office might have been sweet but they are transitory compared with the bitterness of long memories that stretch back to the days of Joh Bjelke-Petersen when he was a player in the powerful "legislation and policy branch" of the department.

And, to quote crimebuster Tony Fitzgerald: "When the inquiry was established in 1987, the National Party attorney-general was advised and influenced by a small ambitious group of Justice Department bureaucrats.

"The attorney-general appointed one, John Sosso, as secretary to the inquiry.

"Sosso didn't last long in that role but returned to the Justice Department which, as the Inquiry's report notes, did little willingly to assist the Inquiry."

Strike one, I guess.

And then he was deputy DG when the government of Rob Borbidge launched the costly and ill-fated Connolly-Ryan inquiry, seen by many as a ham-fisted attempt to discredit the Fitzgerald reforms.

Strike two.

I may have dozed off for an innings but in recent times he was made boss of the merged departments of Justice and Attorney-General, which ironically gave him oversight of the Crime and Misconduct Commission, the lineal descendant of a key Fitzgerald initiative.

He was on the panel that oversaw questionable changes to the Crime and Misconduct Commission. He was professionally involved in some of the Newman government's more outrageous activities, including snatching away lucrative legal briefs from the regime's perceived enemies.

He was at his desk while the government serially demeaned and humiliated the judiciary, culminating in the appointment of Tim Carmody as Chief Justice.

And he and his department had an inevitable role in the intemperate, illiberal and intolerable edicts that were key components of the government's hysterical law and order campaign.

As a DG, Sosso's role might not have been to reason why, but the Nuremberg defence has its limitations in the public service.

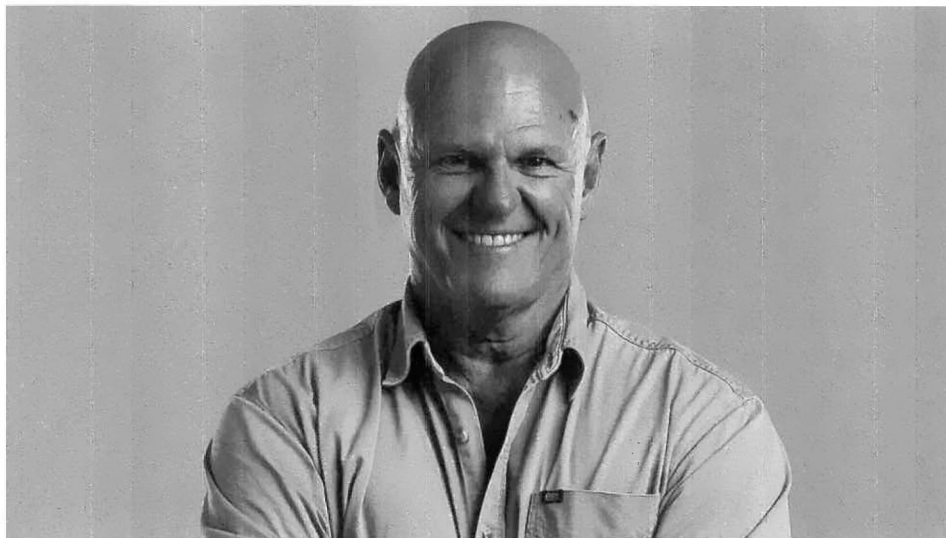


The irony is that as Sosso heard the guillotine blade whispering down, he might reasonably have thought he was paying the price of guilt by association.

[Email Terry Sweetman](#)

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