

Newman and Bleijie's inadequate non-apology

By Alex McKean

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Given the scale of the arrogance displayed he and his Government, the apology offered by Campbell Newman this week is manifestly inadequate, writes [Alex McKean](#).

“Sorry” seems to be the hardest word

OVER A LIFETIME, you can expect to be both the maker and recipient of a number of apologies.

Having been on the receiving end of a number of apologies, or attempted apologies, it can be said that they have been of variable quality. Some of them have frankly been so weak as to hardly deserve to be described as apologies at all.

Premier Campbell Newman’s [effort](#) in the aftermath of the annihilation of the Stafford by-election falls comfortably within that category of non-apologies.

The context of the Premier’s attempt at contrition is important. It was forthcoming directly after a Cabinet meeting [mysteriously](#)

[convened at Daisy Hill](#) — a step that prevented the media pack from questioning Ministers entering the meeting.

Perhaps, some of the Premier’s colleagues finally summoned up the intestinal fortitude to acquaint their delusional leader with the [scope of the electoral disaster](#) faced by his government. One can only imagine an ultimatum being delivered to the effect that Newman either dial back his usual arrogant level of criticism dismissal or face an immediate spill.

Presumably, the LNP backbench, driven beyond nervousness into apoplexy, collectively expressed the desire to maintain their public role for a further term and avoid a return to their former ordinary – in most cases very ordinary – lives outside Parliament.

When the Premier fronted the cameras, he said:

“I just want to say I am sorry today if we have done things that have upset people.”

It is worthwhile examining a handful of the variety of particular things Newman has said and done over the last couple of years to upset various people to determine just how far short of the mark his attempted apology has fallen.

The vague, general, non-apology does not mention the Premier’s [attack](#) on retired Supreme Court Justice [Richard Chesterman](#),

whom he described as an *"apologist for paedophiles"*, in response to criticism of the Government's sex offender legislation.

Considering Mr Chesterman had described the laws as *"bad law and bad policy"* – a sentiment with which the Queensland Court of Appeal appeared to agree when it [struck the legislation down](#) – one would think a proper apology would need to be a tad more fulsome and groveling.

In April 2011, while seeking to be elected Premier, Mr Newman declared that public servants had ["nothing to fear"](#) from an LNP government.

By [September 2012](#) – within six months of coming to power – Newman was announcing 14,000 public servant positions in Queensland would be cut.

Unless the Premier intends to expand on his belated attempt at contrition, while door-knocking those 14,000, his words will be cold comfort to those former workers and their families.

In March 2014, the Premier threatened doctors working in public hospitals, saying they could either sign the contracts being offered to them by his Government, or he would replace them by [recruiting from interstate and overseas](#).

The numbers from the [Prince Charles Hospital booth](#) in the Stafford by-election, showing a 29% swing against the LNP, indicate further effort may be required on the Premier's part to make amends to health professionals.

It was open to the Premier to apologise to Chris Hannay, the Gold Coast solicitor he publicly [accused](#) of being part of the *"criminal gang machine"* who *"takes money from people who sell drugs to teenagers"*. Indeed, under the [Defamation Act 2005 \(Qld\)](#), such an apology could have avoided the necessity for expensive litigation, with the public

shouldering the burden of the Premier's legal costs.

Mr Hannay's defamation action is, of course, being brought against the Attorney-General, [Jarrod Bleijie](#), as well as the premier.

In April this year, I [wrote](#):

'...the Newman-Bleijie axis has been incredibly destructive of the trust the public placed in the LNP two years ago. So much goodwill has been squandered that many of those who have been overshadowed by this pair of incompetents will stand to lose their seats in the not too distant future.'

But, in the aftermath of the Stafford carnage, the Premier has ruled out a reshuffle, [resisting pressure to remove Bleijie](#).

In a masterpiece of self-contradiction, the Premier, first, said his entire team backed everything Bleijie had done. But then Mr. Newman said that he and his Attorney-General would be seeking a meeting with senior members of the judiciary to *"smooth over"* the continuing feud between the judiciary and his Government, for which Bleijie is primarily to blame.

Those meetings might be considerably more fruitful if the Premier had the backbone to sack Bleijie and take along a freshly-minted Attorney-General and not one burdened with the baggage of leaking confidential discussions with [senior judges](#) and the [President of the Queensland Bar Association](#).

If the Premier were serious about rebuilding relationships with the judiciary and the legal fraternity, he would recognise that Bleijie is an irredeemable liability and throw him under the political bus.

On the way out the door, Bleijie could assist the LNP's electoral prospects by issuing a few

apologies of his own, at the very least to those people who thought they could rely on him to keep confidences.

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For instance, one person due an apology from Bleijie is Ross Martin, the former head of the CMC, whom Bleijie disgracefully painted as having "[resigned in the wake of a shredding scandal](#)", when actually Mr. Martin quit due to ill health, requiring a [lung transplant](#).

It is interesting that the unpopular policies Newman says will be rolled back – including by reinstating the requirement for bipartisanship in selecting the head of the corruption watchdog and not segregating bikies in jail or making them wear pink jumpsuits – are strongly identified with the bumbling Bleijie.

Newman has, however, remained steadfast in saying asset sales remain part of the LNP agenda. If there had been a true change of heart, this deeply unpopular policy would also be dumped.

If the Premier really wanted to regain the trust of the electorate, he would:

- a. issue a proper apology in every quarter where his arrogance has caused offence; sack his incompetent Attorney-General;
- b. retrospectively, roll back the changes to the electoral donation laws, revealing all donations made during the '[brown paper bag](#)' period; and
- c. institute judicial inquiries into the cash for legislation scandals involving [Sibelco](#) and [Karreman Quarries](#) and into the [shambolic appointment](#) of the new Chief Justice.

Given the scale of the arrogance displayed by Newman and Bleijie, an inadequate apology from one and none at all from the other is entirely inadequate.