

# It's still too soon to tell

IT is, of course, too early to say whether Nunawading represents a Napoleonic turn in the fortunes of the Cain Government.

Perhaps in a few years time we shall look back and view it as an electoral Moscow, the reversal that starts a winter of retreat.

John Cain, no romantic empire-builder in the Bonaparte mould, played down any suggestion that this was a watershed or a roll-back.

He was at pains to explain that Nunawading no "Bass of

## COMMENT

By KEN MERRIGAN

'85", a reference to the Tasmanian by-election which marked the start of the decline for the Whitlam Government.

The result, he said repeatedly, was in line with the anti-government swing to be expected in any by-election.

His comments could not disguise the bitter blow dealt to Labor which invested heavily in the campaign, both in dollars

and moral commitment. In an election so cluttered with issues and interest groups, it is seductive to construct elaborate theories over why Nunawading voted as it did.

## Impact

Undoubtedly the mountain cattlemen had an impact, along with protests by restive police and walkouts by railmen: so did local issues such as freeways and brothels.

But it is hard to ignore the obvious conclusion that the voters were moved by a more fundamental issue: whether the

Government should have unfettered control of Parliament.

Nunawading has voted decisively in favor of a brake in the Upper House — and in doing so has reflected a concern about the legislative paths on to which the Government might stray.

A jubilant Jeff Kennett, meanwhile, described the result as a huge whack around the knuckles for the Premier and portrayed it as the sign of a rejuvenated Liberal Party.

It was a much-needed tonic for the Opposition which has performed indifferently since being ousted from office in 1982.

## A smile, then on with the party

By KEN MERRIGAN

FOR Bob Ives there was little agony.

It took just 90 minutes once the polling booths closed in Nunawading for him to recognise that luck would play no part in the result of the return bout.

Was he disappointed? Of course, he admitted later as he joined Labor supporters at his office for a surprisingly upbeat party.

People there spoke of the devastating impact of the mountain cattlemen and their romantic image on Labor's chances. The rail strike, some mused, had sealed the result against the Government.

Throughout it all Mr Ives, 46, smiled vigorously, maintaining a philosophical amiability.

He said the party had done everything possible to win the seat, but the usual by-election swing against governments was too great to surmount.

"In the end the votes just weren't there to be got," Mr Ives said.

"I would say that the Nunawading voters allowed their votes to be diffused by a number of interest groups that were essentially irrelevant to the agenda we were trying to set."

"I still think the message we tried to get across was the right message."

Mr Ives, who threw in his job as a business lecturer at Swinburne, said he would now pick up the threads of his life.

"I feel sure I'll be able to get a reasonable job," he said.

Did he feel cheated, after being awarded the seat in the lottery result of March 2?

"I'd much rather be in Parliament than out of Parliament," he explained. "But it's no use complaining."

With that, Mr Ives returned to the party, still smiling.



● Where did we go wrong? ... Mr Cain yesterday.

## Little comfort for Peacock: Hawke

By JOHN HINE

THE Opposition leader, Mr Peacock, could take little comfort from the Nunawading result, the Prime Minister, Mr Hawke, said yesterday.

But Mr Peacock said the win was a shot in the arm for the Liberal Party.

Mr Hawke said the result was the normal swing in a by-election.

"I would suggest, friendly and charitable chap that I am, he (Mr Peacock) ought to be looking at his own rear guard — Mr Howard is behind his back and ready to knock him off," he said.

Asked if he was disappointed by the result, he replied: "Do I look devastated?"

"The swing was no more than the normal swing against governments in a situation where you have nine candidates and Government is not at stake. Mr Cain and the party are

entitled to feel very comfortable about that result.

"It is quite clear they would easily win a state general election."

Mr Hawke said he was confident the ALP would also win the next federal election, not due until 1988.

Mr Peacock estimated the swing at about 6 per cent. He said the Labor Party would lose about 15 seats if that swing was maintained in a state election.

Mr Peacock said Mr Hawke's performance had affected the decision.

"This victory belongs overwhelmingly to Jeff Kennett — he has campaigned magnificently despite Labor's massive expenditure and the campaign of personal vilification," he said.

## Spanner in hand, Varty claims victory

By KEN MERRIGAN

ROSEMARY Varty, delicately framed member-elect for Nunawading, became almost lyrical as she reflected on the conservative uprising that accompanied her campaign.

Clutching the trophy of her win, a spanner awarded by the Opposition Leader, Jeff Kennett, at the victory party, she explained that people such as mountain cattlemen and chiropractors had become political for the first time.

"I guess everyone sees themselves as a man from Snowy River, with the sort of things that he epitomises — whether its heritage, determination, all of these matters," she said.

Speaking at her neat townhouse in Box Hill yesterday, she warned that Victoria had seen the rise of a political phenomenon in the rerun election that lifted her to office.

It was as though the silent majority had suddenly found voice.

Normally quiet, conservative people had organised to explain their problems and canvass support.

"I think there is an important message there," she said. "I think you'll see a lot more groups over the next couple of years doing that."

Glowing contentedly, Ms Varty, 51, said she never felt Labor was making up ground after party polls gave her a lead of 5 or 6 per cent.

That view was reinforced during the final two weeks of the campaign, as regular Labor voters expressed support for her.

"Even yesterday I had one Labor guy, who was handing out how-to-vote cards, who came up to me and said, 'I'm handing these out, but I voted for you'," she said.

Labor, she said, had not addressed the issues — and people appreciated the Liberal grass-roots strategy, such as the morning visits to stations to press the flesh among commuters.

It was a methodical campaign befitting a highly-trained accountant, one who planned to use her talents to throw light on the Budget books.

Not even the reports of how much Labor was spending on its effort — more than \$300,000 — threw her off course.

"What we were doing was what was needed to be done and we worked through this carefully," she said.

"I've lived in this area all my life. I know the area very, very well."

"I know the sorts of issues that were important in the area."

Still, all that attention to detail did not remove all doubt as she faced up to one of the most fiercely contested results in a single electorate campaign.

"I had a view that it would either be very tight again or else it would be a very decisive margin," she said.

"As it turned out, it was very decisive."

She would, she said, be a voice for the eastern suburbs — speaking up for the conservative groups which were asking to be counted.

● A smiling poll finale, Page 38.

## Democrats 'not unhappy'

THE massive drop in support for the Australian Democrats in Nunawading is the beginning of the end, other parties claim.

National Party Leader, Mr Ross-Edwards, said the Democrats were the greatest losers of the election.

And the Nuclear Disarmament Party said the result signalled the decline of a party which did not count when the real issues were at stake.

But Democrats state president, Mrs Janet Powell, yesterday said the 3 per cent swing away from her party did not signal its demise.

She denied that by directing preferences to the A.L.P., the Democrats had

lost many of their traditional supporters.

The Democrats got 4 per cent of the Nunawading vote — after predicting that they would poll 14 per cent.

Mrs Powell said: "We are not desperately unhappy with the result. It's not the sort of thing you can say during the campaign but it's not what we consider a devastating result."

Mr Ross-Edwards said the election proved that Labor could not buy votes as their big spending had backfired.

He said the Nationals now had the balance of power in the Upper House.

— SUZY FREEMAN-GREENE

## How they polled

Candidate	Party	%	Votes
SMITH, Basil	Ind.	(0.42)	410
WATSON, Al	Coal to Aust.	(2.62)	2539
FERWEDA, Peter	DLP	(1.34)	1300
IVES, Bob	ALP	(39.36)	38,114
KAPPAN, Bill	Ind.	(0.07)	69
VARTY, Rosemary	Lib.	(48.92)	47,379
NARDELLA, Michael	Democrats	(4.57)	4434
LUMSDEN, Brian	Ind.	(0.19)	178
COTTERELL, Jenny	NDP	(2.5)	2419
INFORMAL		(1.96)	1938