

# To the voters go the spoils

**T**HE grass is most certainly greener in Nunawading these days. Anyone not fortunate enough to live there could now be excused for considering a quick change of address. The only drawback for the happy constituents of the Legislative Council Province is the plague of baby-kissing and speech-making which surrounds the August 17 election. But, given the generous mood of the Cain Government, that seems a small price to pay. Because in the heat of the campaign, it seems that the Premier and his team simply can't help themselves. Initially there was a three hour transport scheme for the outer suburbs and the PR bally-hoo which accompanied it. Next, the first Youth Guarantee jobs went Nunawading's way. Then, this week, came the news that the Province was getting a healthy share of 104 new nursing home beds. What next? Free dinners with John and Nancye? Give-away Weeties?

The Cain administration has been quick

to deny any electoral bias. Pork barrelling? Never. All three initiatives were first pledged in the run-up to the March 2 state election, they say. Perhaps the advertisements for Government services and schemes — at an estimated cost of \$1.5 million — can be justified because at least they promote features which are statewide. But the other handouts are clearly designed to prime the parish pump. Of course it is pork barrelling. And it isn't even subtle enough to be good pork barrelling.

But then, very little about the Cain Government's campaign to win Nunawading has been discreet. Stage one was a vigorous personal attack on Opposition Leader, Mr Kennett, including the "Spanner in the works" advertisement and some acerbic public statements by the Premier. Despite the righteous statements of days gone by — when daughters and budgerigars were the issues of the moment — Mr Cain's statements amounted to playing the man, not the ball. Stage two — the gift-giving —

is also to be deplored. It is politically expedient. It is transparent. It also underestimates the intelligence of the Nunawading voter and will alienate others.

A great deal is hinging on this election. It will decide who controls the numbers in the Upper House which will decide whether the Government can implement its legislative program, or have it frustrated by the Opposition. In that sense, Nunawading is the wider issue: who runs the State. But the people of Nunawading have a right to consider local issues as well. Mr Cain and his team know this and are fighting the campaign on both fronts. The strategy can't be faulted, but the method gives cause for concern.

The Cain Government is not the first incumbent to use the advantages of office in an election campaign. The danger is that although it might win votes in the Nunawading re-run, its cynical tactics will do nothing for its long-term credibility.