

G20 summit helps seal Queensland's place in political sun

Peter Costello



The G20 leaders summit to be held in Brisbane in 2014 will be the biggest political meeting ever held in this country. The G20 represents two-thirds of the world's population and 90 per cent of its gross domestic product. The right to host the meeting sparked a State of Origin war between Queensland and NSW, which, as usual, Queensland won.

The only other time the G20 met in Australia was the meeting of central bankers and finance ministers in Melbourne in 2006. It was a very success-

ful meeting, but it generated awful television coverage for the city. A self-styled "Stop G20" movement surrounded the venue and tried to prevent delegates getting in and out.

Aid groups attacked the forum as being indifferent to, or conniving in, global poverty. The celebrity aid activist Bono gatecrashed the event to hold forth on how the leaders were failing the world. And the Victorian police allowed demonstrators to smash property – even police property – as part of a rampage through city streets. The pictures of Melbourne beamed around the world looked just like the scenes we are now seeing from riots in Athens or Madrid.

I should make it clear that frontline police did a magnificent job and were appalled by the violence and disruption. Their commanders were keen to take a tougher line, but this was the time when Christine Nixon was the commissioner of Victorian Police. Sensitive policing meant giving young

anarchists a free hand and picking them up after they had caused their vandalism and damage.

When it was all over, Nixon saw no fault with her policing methods. She said the mayhem showed it was not "appropriate" to hold such events in major cities. In other words, ministers and leaders who obey the law should stay away from Melbourne because protesters and demonstrators do not. After that experience there was no chance Melbourne would host another important international event like that again – at least not while the G20 and that theory of policing were fresh in the memory.

Sydney and Brisbane see the value in staging large international political and diplomatic events. If New York can host the United Nations, if Washington can host the International Monetary Fund, if London, Toronto and Pittsburgh can host the G20, why shouldn't Sydney and Brisbane put themselves on the international map?

Brisbane will be the centre of the world for a weekend in November 2014. It will come of age as an international city.

In 1956 Melbourne put itself on the international map by hosting the Olympics. It reflected ambition and

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confidence. In 2000 Sydney, which by then was a lot more brassy and confident than Melbourne, hosted the Olympics. And with the G20 summit the centre of gravity will move north again.

This is in keeping with the direction of economic opportunity and the population growth that is following it.

Queensland is profiting from a mining boom just as Victoria did in the 19th century. It does not see itself as a provincial backwater. Nor will the global media as they report the deliberations of world leaders in 2014.

Sydney and Melbourne will have to get used to growing political clout coming out of Brisbane. Queensland now has 30 seats in the House of Representatives compared with 37 for Victoria and 48 for NSW. On current polling there could be as many as 29 Queensland Liberal National members elected to the lower house at the next election. They could be the largest state bloc in the Coalition party room. With more members, they will claim more seats in the cabinet. One reason the next Coalition government will be different from the last will be the enormous sway held by the Queenslanders.

The landslide victory of Campbell Newman in the state election has given the Queensland LNP enormous confid-

ence. Newman sees himself as the "can-do" Premier. He is not afraid of controversial decisions. He wants to change the state. He is intent on turning Queensland around and making it an economic powerhouse.

Over the past 18 months, Coalition governments have been elected in each of the three eastern states. It will be natural for people to compare them. If Queensland becomes the pacesetter on reform, it will put a lot of competitive pressure on the other states to lift the tempo of their efforts.

Melbourne's lord mayor, Robert Doyle, said the city did not want to host the G20 summit. If so, Melbourne took the attitude of Hobart and Adelaide.

But Sydney still has ambition. As does Brisbane. Which is now gaining on its once more fancied rivals.

Peter Costello, a former federal treasurer, chairs the Queensland government's Commission of Audit.