

Premier's smoking gun fires up critics

■ COMMENT
By Anne Burns

ONE minister's lack of discipline is another's display of leadership in the burly-burly of perception politics.

Axed Labour Relations Minister Graham Kierath has paid the price for his outspoken opposition to Cabinet attempts to overrule his workplace anti-smoking measures.

He outraged Cabinet colleagues by campaigning publicly against exemptions from a smoking ban for hotels, nightclubs and Burswood Casino.

But some coalition



Mr Kierath

MPs were asking yesterday why other ministers with a habit of breaking ranks, such as Colin Barnett, had not been pulled into line.

And why Mr Kierath, the Government's best parliamentary performer, was demoted when other ministers who were total duds in the House kept their jobs.

Mr Barnett is often at odds with Premier Richard Court and party policy. But he is not penalised.

Mr Kierath's demotion to employment and training came two days after he was praised by Mr Court at the party's State conference for achievements in labour relations.

He refused to comment on the irony of his downgraded position.

But by taking away the only hold he had over Mr Kierath, Mr Court has created a potential headache for his Government.

The outspoken minister is now likely to feel less constrained in the party room and in public when he disagrees with Government decisions.

Mr Court cannot afford any more disgruntled Liberal critics.

Disenchantment among backbenchers over this most superficial of Cabinet changes has already spilled over into speculation about his leadership.

There is a strong whiff of second-term arrogance in Mr Court's refusal to listen to Cabinet and parliamentary colleagues about the need to rejuvenate the Government.

If the new line-up fails to arrest the coalition's slide in opinion polls, Mr Court's decision to stick with the current team could signal the beginning of the end — for him if not the Government.

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