

Liberal desert deputy

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SUPPORT within the Liberal Party for South Australian Deputy Premier Graham Ingerson is rapidly evaporating, amid speculation he may quit before the full heat of a parliamentary trial over a turf scandal.

Close supporters of Premier John Olsen expressed frustration yesterday that he would not take decisive action to remove Mr Ingerson before the accident-prone deputy further damaged the Government's agenda.

They are concerned the Premier is again in the grip of "the Baker syndrome", which saw him stand by controversial former finance minister and close ally Dale Baker throughout last year, paralysing his leadership.

On Thursday, Mr Ingerson became the first politician in State parliament's 140-year history to have to face a privileges committee investigation into misleading parliament.

Mr Olsen yesterday rejected suggestions Mr Ingerson should stand aside for the 21-day inquiry, stating no precedent existed for such a move.

He refused to be drawn on Mr Ingerson's future and Mr Ingerson would not comment yesterday.

Liberal sources said that in the past 24 hours Mr Ingerson had seen-sawed between wanting to tough out the inquiry, resigning as deputy or quitting politics altogether. "Ingo is all over the place at the moment ... (but) I think this is the end of the road for him," one source close to the Premier said.

Labor forced the Government to accept the inquiry after producing evidence contradicting earlier denials by Mr Ingerson that he had discussed the sacking of the head of the State Thoroughbred Racing Authority, Merv Hill, with prominent Liberal figure and former authority chairman Rob Hodge.

The nature of the evidence — a statutory declaration that Mr Hodge gave to Labor treasury spokesman Kevin Foley — underscores the internal warfare that has become a trademark of State Liberal politics.

Some Liberal advisers were incredulous yesterday that after the statutory declaration had been produced in Parliament on Wednesday, Mr Ingerson had returned to the Government benches late that night to deliver a ministerial statement confirming he had discussed Mr Hill's position with Mr Hodge.

The *Weekend Australian* understands the statement was prepared by Attorney-General Trevor Griffin and Mr Olsen's chief-of-staff, John Chapman, while Mr Olsen was in Melbourne attending the Adelaide 36ers National Basketball League finals victory over South East Melbourne Magic.

This left Speaker John Oswald, a close friend of Mr Hodge, no option but to take the unprecedented step of recommending a privileges inquiry.

The five-member committee — made up of two Liberal, two Labor and one Independent MPs — met behind closed doors last night, but Labor MPs were seeking a legal ruling on the validity of barring the media.

Killer wins kudos in a city as hard as steel

STEFANIE BALOGH

IMAGINE if two retirees were murdered and their bodies mutilated within the sanctity of their homes late on a Friday night. Imagine, too, that the killings occurred within two weeks of each other and only kilometres apart in the same coastal regional city.

Couple this with the belief that the murderer, probably someone both victims knew and trusted, was being profiled as a serial killer who was looking to strike again.

Unease, if not plain fear, would normally grip any community. But not so in the working-class city of Wollongong on the NSW south coast.

When news broke that the battered body of Australia's longest-serving mayor, accused pederast Frank Arkell, had been discovered in his granny flat early last weekend, the public's sympathy seemed weighted more towards his killer than him.

The local newspaper, The Illawarra Mercury, went to press with an eight-page "Frank Arkell murder special edition". The paper's editor-in-chief, Peter Cullen, declared that in Wollongong, the only ones "shaking in their boots" would be the paedophiles.

The day after Arkell's body was discovered, children played on a swingset in the parkland reserve metres from his house, which had been roped off with police tape.

It seemed that in the steel city, life went on regardless.

Resident Paul Tansey summarised the mood: "It doesn't really bother me if someone is going around knocking off paedophiles, if they are paedophiles. But if it's someone going around and committing murders, that's different."

Instead of public mourning, many openly declared that perhaps Arkell had finally got what he deserved.

His murder occurred two weeks after bachelor David O'Hearn was beheaded in his townhouse in the city's southern suburb of Albion Park Rail.

Strike Force detectives investigating Arkell's murder are refusing to rule out the possibility it was linked to O'Hearn's and a third, similar mutilation killing of convicted Sydney paedophile Trevor



Before the troubles: Arkell with entertainer Liberace in 1984



Defiant: Arkell leaves court last year

‘ This has created a climate that where someone takes the law into their own hands there is considerable sympathy for them ’

JEAN LENNANE

John Parkin in December.

Arkell's murder has highlighted community attitudes towards paedophilia.

In possible revenge killings like Arkell's, sympathy often lies with the killer because, it is claimed, they have an understandable motive.

Jean Lennane, from the Australian Child Protection Alliance, says the public's attitude to Arkell's death is regrettable, but understandable, because many believe paedophilia victims cannot expect to get justice.

"This has created a climate that where someone takes the law into their own hands there is considerable sympathy for them," she says.

Also critical of the response to Arkell's death is his barrister, Phillip Boulten, who continues to protest his client's innocence: "It has become acceptable, not just in the community but in the newspapers, to be able to express the view that it is a just and proper thing to murder someone you find offensive."

It appears that whoever took Arkell's life on the night of Friday, June 26, had a grudge. He was not only savagely beaten around the head, possibly with a hammer, but his face was punctured with his Rotary badge and tie pin. His blood was splattered in every room of his granny flat.

Arkell was waiting to go to trial on four child sex charges in September. The NSW Child Protection Enforcement



No fanfare: Arkell's funeral on Thursday

Picture: GRANT TURNER

Agency had arrested and charged him with 29 counts in May last year after allegations flowed from the NSW police royal commission.

But amid the long-standing rumours and smearing of his name, it has never been proved he was a child molester.

Indeed, Arkell vehemently denied all the allegations and

labelled the royal commission "a Spanish Inquisition".

But, in the eyes of many of his constituents, he was guilty.

Months before his death, he had become the target of a vicious hate campaign. His royal commission codename, W1, had been spraypainted on his brick fence along with the words "you're a wanker". The

once-charismatic politician had become a virtual recluse.

One alleged victim, who went to the commission, says he has been "ripped off" by Arkell's murderer.

"From the details in the papers, it does sound that there is somebody out there that is very angry and I can understand his anger or her anger, because I've had the same anger in the past," he says.

Aged 32 and a father of two, he says: "I wish this person would have come to the police and joined us (other victims) in court".

Civil libertarian Kevin O'Rourke says legal tenets, such as innocent before proven guilty, can become lost and overwhelmed in the emotional debate about paedophilia.

"The more horrific the crime, the easier it is to throw away basic protections and justify departing from the ordinary standards," O'Rourke says.