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NEWS 27

Red letter day for mayor



Hannah Davies

A QUEENSLAND mayor has been accused of running a "soviet-style" organisation, after gagging his councillors and holding meetings behind closed doors.

The State Government has stepped in, after receiving dozens of complaints about "power crazy" Scenic Rim Regional Council Mayor John Brent.

Jeanette Lockey, the president of the Mt Tamborine Progress Association, said Cr Brent, criti-

cised for a behaving more like former Russian president Vladimir Putin than cold-war dictator Joseph Stalin, was "out of control". "It's like he's trying to run a dictatorship," she said.

A culture of secrecy is emerging as a problem in councils across Queensland, with previous *Courier-Mail* reports revealing how Brisbane and Logan city councils are also censoring councillors.

Difficulties began at the Scenic Rim Regional Council soon after

amalgamation in March. Cr Brent began making decisions without the public's knowledge in "confidential" meetings. And in May, he issued a new policy, preventing councillors talking to the media or public — unless they wished to "support a whole-of-council issue".

But the Department of Local Government ordered Cr Brent to change his behaviour. The director-general said in a letter Cr Brent was not allowed to hold confidential meetings.

Cr Brent refused to comment yesterday. But in a previous letter to *Tamborine Mountain News*, he said councillors were "vulnerable" and he needed "consistency and validity" in the release of information. "This is corporate governance working for the community," Cr Brent wrote.

A spokesman for Local Government Minister Warren Pitt yesterday said the council had "amended" its policy on the meetings and would be sharing more information.

DICTATORIAL? ... more like Putin than Stalin, left, but John Brent, right, is accused of taking a soviet-style hammer and sickle to policy.