

EDITORIAL, May 25, 1995

# Big shoes to fill

**M**ARSHALL Perron's resignation leaves a giant gap in the CLP Government and in the Territory Parliament.

He was a reluctant contender in 1988 when he replaced Nightcliff MLA Steve Hatton as Chief Minister. Mr Perron agreed to fill the post only after a great deal of pressure from colleagues.

His first two years were not happy ones. He presided over the loss of two by-elections, Flynn (now Greatorex) to the Nationals and Wanguri to Labor. He also saw incumbent Labor MHR Warren Snowdon consolidate his hold over the Territory's single seat in the House of Representatives.

But Mr Perron, typically, did not lose his nerve. He went on to lead the CLP to a narrow victory in the 1990 general election.

Arguably, Mr Perron came into his own after that election. His Government implemented wide-ranging measures under which the public sector was trimmed, the Sheratons and part of Yulara sold, debt brought under control, tourism and education restructured, the Asian push affirmed, and the Territory's finances sanitised.

## Prudent

This was a very good government and Territorians knew it. In last year's election, they gave the CLP a mandate to continue a prudently reformist path.

But Mr Perron's contribution to Territory politics went well beyond the demands of public administration. For seven years as Chief Minister and, before that, some 14 years on the front bench, he was a symbol of stability and common sense.

No government, least of all in the Northern Territory, is free from occasional turmoil. In the midst of great problems, Mr Perron was the pillar that held his colleagues together.

History will be kind to this man who has represented so well the aspirations of most Territorians for so many years.

To him we bid a fond farewell.

But politics, the biggest business in the Northern Territory, goes on. With Barry Coulter standing aside, the path has been cleared for Port Darwin MLA Shane Stone to become Chief Minister.

Mr Stone has some very big shoes to fill. And here is the beauty of democracy. It not only allows a smooth transition of power but, usually, the job also makes the man (or woman).

In this case it is a large job — as large as the Northern Territory — and only time will tell if Mr Stone can fill it.