

Sacred cows challenged

THERE seems to be, in these turbulent economic and political times, a refreshing trend for some politicians to challenge "sacred cows".

Although some Labor members, like Senator Walsh, have been conspicuous critics of time-honored processes and practices, most of the challenges have come from non-Labor circles.

John Hewson, with his recent comments on taxes and social welfare, has incurred the wrath of vested interests by suggesting new and radical approaches. Nick Greiner in New South Wales, albeit constrained by being in office, has developed a reputation for innovation and experiment.

In the Territory, Shane Stone is becoming within the CLP parliamentary party the voice of radicalism.

Given his personality, background and record as CLP president, his assumption of such a role was to be expected.

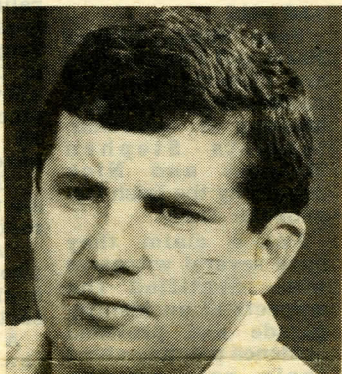
It is to be applauded and encouraged.

In recent times, the CLP in the Assembly has become a notoriously conservative and hide-bound party desperately in need of rejuvenation.

Last year's electoral victory has done nothing to shake the CLP out of its lethargic and complacent disposition.

Barry Coulter once supplied the spark of vision and vitality but that has gone.

Stone, if he can avoid the



Mr Stone

infection of inertia, could be a catalyst to re-ignite the spirit of enterprise and non-conformity that was a characteristic of the early CLP.

Stone's comments last week on stress leave in the Public Service as a "boon to the malingers, the lazy and the incompetent" and on his support for the re-introduction of the 40-hour week "as a measure to combat the national recession" were further examples of his willingness to tackle politically sensitive issues.

Since the damage done to the CLP electoral stocks in mid-1987 by the Government's largely abortive attempts to change Public Service conditions, the CLP has been loathe to re-enter that thorny arena of political conflict or the wider area of industrial relations.

Hopefully, Stone's statements will steel the CLP to reconsider the burden on Territory finances from the size of the Public Service and its work conditions.

It will be interesting to see what measures the present expenditure review implements in relation to the personnel costs of the Public Service.

Marshall Perron would be well advised to include Stone in the review team; if his comments are to be taken at face value, Stone would prove a stern and dedicated cost-cutter.

I look forward to more of Stone's hard-nosed critiques of the herd of "sacred cows" fattening themselves in the Territory. Given the angry response of the ALP and the unions to his industrial relations, they will certainly enliven local politics.

●Alistair Heatley is Reader in Politics at the Northern Territory University. His next column will appear on April 4, when he returns from holidays.

