Avoid assault on democracy

THE adoption of the proposal for a new structure, the Committee of the Legislative Assembly, to shift control and management of all aspects of the Queensland Parliament’s administration to a committee divorced from the Speaker, would create a dangerous precedent for all our parliamentary democracies.

The Speaker’s exclusion from this committee, and the inclusion of the executive’s two most senior members, the premier and deputy premier, is an insult to the doctrine of the separation of powers.

The separation of powers and functions of the Parliament, executive government and the judiciary provides one of the fundamental checks and balances in any truly democratic society.

Current arrangements under the Parliamentary Service Act 1998 are based on a clear demarcation between the executive and Parliament; give authority to the Speaker for the overview of the Parliament and its precinct, and underline the principle that an independent Parliament is the basis of an effective parliamentary democracy.

The position of Speaker ensures, as much as can be, the independence of the Parliament. In the interests of our democratic system of government, it is essential that the Speaker be not only a member of this committee, but also its chair, assuming, as we think is not the case, such a committee is necessary or desirable.

Parliaments dominated by the executive have never served their people well. Effective control of parliamentary administration would pass from the Speaker to the Leader of Government Business – the proposed chair of the CLA.

We counsel against this assault on democracy in Queensland.

On any view, the Speaker should chair such a committee of the Legislative Assembly, if it is to be insisted on.

Hon Ian Callinan; Suri Ratnapala; Nicholas Aroney; Dr Michael White, QC; David Russell, QC; Scott Prasser; David Muir; Kevin Rozzoli; Dr Ken Coghill; Jim Fouras; Mike Reynolds; Neil Turner; Lin Powell; Ray Hollis; Rob Borbidge; Terry White; Beryce Neison; Tom Gilmore; Bill Hewitt; Manfred Cross; David Watson; Judy Gamin; Brian Cahill