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No change in the 'moonlight state', says Tony Bellino

Sarah Elks | July 22, 2009

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Article from: THE AUSTRALIAN

TONY Bellino says disgraced politician Gordon Nuttall may have been jailed last week but nothing has changed in Queensland since the landmark Fitzgerald inquiry into police and political corruption.

"When there's money, there's corruption and greed," Mr Bellino, the 1980s nightclub baron who was accused of being involved in organised crime in Brisbane, said while sitting in his Fortitude Valley restaurant yesterday.

Nuttall, a Beattie government cabinet minister, was last week jailed on 36 counts of corruptly receiving secret payments worth \$360,000 from coalmining executives.

Queensland Attorney-General Cameron Dick yesterday dismissed calls for an appeal against Nuttall's sentence, after opposition justice spokesman Lawrence Springborg described it as "lenient".

Premier Anna Bligh has been adamant that Nuttall's actions do not mean a return to pre-Fitzgerald days in Queensland.

Mr Bellino, whose brother Gerry was sentenced to seven years' jail for official corruption following the Fitzgerald inquiry, admits he was a "main character" of the Fitzgerald drama, but denies any wrongdoing.

Tony Bellino owned the Roxy and the Beat nightclubs and was named in the inquiry's terms of reference but never charged.

He said his nightclub business was destroyed after the negative publicity arising from the Fitzgerald inquiry.

Gerry Bellino, also a nightclub owner, ran some of Fortitude Valley's infamous illegal casinos, a lucrative trade because police turned a blind eye to them. A third brother, Vincenzo Bellino, launched a lengthy defamation action against the ABC and journalist Chris Masters -- who broke the story that led to the Fitzgerald inquiry -- to clear his name. The legal action was later dismissed.

Tony Bellino said his alleged crimes included involvement in "drugs, prostitution, illegal gambling, corrupting police, sly grog, kidnapping children, Mafia connections and smuggling birds overseas", but said all the allegations were "rubbish".

But, he said, the pre-Fitzgerald times were the "good old days", when prostitution was clean and alcohol was the vice of choice, not drugs.

"Prostitution now, you get the paper, you look in the back and there's 500 girls working. Even though they've got (legal) brothels now, you've got sex videos," Mr Bellino told The Australian.

"It's not nice like it used to be. It was nice and clean. It's like a jungle now, it's all drugs, drugs, drugs."

Mr Bellino said his brother Gerry had been "selfish and silly" to get involved in illegal casinos.

The pair rarely see each other, and Mr Bellino said it was unlikely Gerry would attend last night's official launch of his authorised biography Time for Truth.

Mr Bellino said the book was an attempt to repair his reputation, which was ruined with the Fitzgerald inquiry.

"They destroyed me. I lost the Roxy, I lost the Beat (nightclubs)," he said. "I was just unlucky, I was in the wrong place at the wrong time."

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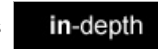
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