

## 2. Parliament's refusal of supply and defeat of Labor, 1957

By the 1950s, Queensland had already earned the dubious distinction of being ruled predominantly by one party. Queensland was a Labor-controlled state—and seemed destined to remain so for the foreseeable future. Continuity in office rather than changes of government had become the norm. Labor had enjoyed office for almost 40 years since 1915 and had been out of office for only a single term during the Great Depression years of 1929–32. The Australian Labor Party (ALP) began its long reign as a popular party of the people, but over time had seen its electoral support decline. Pork-barrelling and corruption associated with long-term incumbency were readily evident and some celebrated cases of ministerial corruption came to light in the 1950s (Parker 1980). From 1949 onwards, the Labor Party benefited from electoral malapportionment, which advantaged the number of parliamentary seats the party obtained (Campbell 1995). Labor's zonal electoral system enabled it to win the 1950 election, despite being out-pollled by the conservatives, although by 1953 and 1956 Labor's support returned, enabling it to win more than 50 per cent of the vote in both elections (Hughes 1980:89–90).

A succession of powerful Labor premiers had stamped their mark on the state and on the character of Queensland politics. Strong and often charismatic premiers were the order of the day, with some—such as T. J. Ryan, 'Red Ted' Theodore, William Forgan Smith (nicknamed 'Foregone Conclusion' because he always got his own way) and Ned Hanlon—achieving mythical status. Premiers ran the state and the political process was characterised by the dominance of executive government. Most premiers had a close connection with the very powerful Australian Workers' Union (AWU), which many argued had long controlled the Labor governments. The Parliament was subordinate to the executive—and, for many Labor cabinets, the Parliament was an irksome appendage to the daily responsibilities of office.

At the 1956 state election, Labor had received 51.22 per cent of the state-wide vote and secured 49 seats in the 75-seat Assembly—a very comfortable majority of 23. For the re-elected incumbents, the immediate prospects were ostensibly rosy and their tenure secure despite some internal rumblings within the organisational wing of the Labor Party. In contrast, the Coalition held a mere 24 seats with a combined vote of 44.34 per cent (the larger Country Party retaining 16 seats on just 19.27 per cent of the vote and the Liberals with only eight seats from 25.07 per cent). The impact of the 'first-past-the-post' voting

system tended to inflate majorities and, together with the malapportioned electoral system based on unequal zones, the outcomes inevitably benefited the government of the day. There appeared to be little relationship between the proportion of state-wide electoral support a party received at the polls and the number of seats in fact gained in the State Parliament. Indeed, any close fit was more by accident than design.

The semblance of continuity was, however, dramatically ruptured in early 1957. After 25 years continuously in office, the Labor government self-destructed after a period of intense internal conflict and policy disagreement. The beginning of the end occurred in late February of that year, with an ultimatum given by the party organisation to the Labor government to deliver on a policy promise or face expulsion under party rules; in quick succession this led to the expulsion of the Premier, Vince Gair, from the Labor Party and the resignation of the Deputy Premier, Jack Duggan, from the Labor ministry. Although the ministry struggled on for a few months without the Parliament sitting, the final phase of the events took place in the Legislative Assembly in June when the Parliament was recalled.

## **The origins and background of the Labor split of 1957**

In the mid-1950s, the Labor Party in Queensland was actively pursuing policies of state development and industrial regulation. Provided economic conditions remained favourable, the Labor government was looking with optimism towards the conclusion of its third decade in government. The Premier, Vince Gair, and his third ministry were sworn in on 28 May 1956. The 11-member cabinet consisted of

- Premier and Chief Secretary: Vince Gair
- Deputy Premier and Minister for Transport: Jack Duggan
- Treasurer: E. J. 'Ted' Walsh
- Secretary for Agriculture and Stock: Harry Collins
- Secretary for Labour and Industry: Arthur Jones
- Secretary for Health and Home Affairs: W. 'Bill' Moore
- Attorney-General: W. 'Bill' Power
- Secretary for Public Lands and Irrigation: Paul Hilton
- Secretary for Mines: Tom Foley

- Secretary for Public Instruction: George Devries<sup>1</sup>
- Secretary for Public Works, Housing and Immigration: Colin McCathie

Its opponents, the Country and Liberal Parties, were fractured and a little despondent about the prospects of ever forming government in the foreseeable future. The Country Party's leader, Frank Nicklin, had led the opposition for a record 16 years, since June 1941, and by 1957, there were rumblings among his colleagues about his ability to lead the conservative side of politics to victory. Nicklin had presided over the opposition under four consecutive Labor premiers (Forgan Smith, Frank Cooper, Ned Hanlon and Vince Gair). The eight Liberals in the Parliament were an unknown quantity and had recently elected a new leader, Ken Morris (first elected to the State Parliament for the Brisbane seat of Enoggera under the banner of the Queensland People's Party and elected Liberal Party leader in August 1954). Hence, with only one-third of the seats in the Parliament and some disgruntled members anxious to topple Nicklin, the opposition parties did not appear to be a serious threat.

Behind the scenes, though, Labor was wrestling with some fundamental questions of ideology and the issue of internal party authority. With the benefit of hindsight, it is apparent that Labor allowed itself to be dragged into internecine feuding, with many of the leading protagonists taking for granted that they would always enjoy a steadfast grip on government. It is clear from the historical record that no-one within the government or the ALP camp was able or willing to call a halt to the infighting or offer an acceptable resolution to the dispute.

The conflict within the government boiled down to the issues of who controlled the policy decision-making process and what policy decisions were appropriate for a long-term Labor government in the context of the postwar Queensland economy. Issues of leadership style and personality conflicts were also contributing factors. Like many once socialist or democratic socialist parties, the Queensland Labor Party had moderated its policy positions and in government had become a pragmatic and institutionalised administration. Increasingly, Labor premiers and their ministries had steered the government well to the right of the party's earlier socialist-inspired doctrines. And like other parties of the left, the Queensland ALP was composed of two distinct organisational entities, each with different immediate objectives and with different pressures weighing on it: the smaller parliamentary party interested in electoral politics and the extra-parliamentary organisation of the party based on Trades Hall. Those

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<sup>1</sup> After Foley was expelled from the ALP, Devries became Secretary for Mines and Les Diplock was promoted to Public Instruction. Devries died one year later, on 13 July 1957, while still a minister—one month before the Labor government fell.

associated with the parliamentary party consisted mainly of the Labor members elected to the Parliament and some supporters and personal assistants—with most of the political influence among this group residing in the Premier and ministry. The extra-parliamentary wing consisted of the party organisation, the powerful 65-member Queensland Central Executive (QCE) of the party and the affiliated trade unions. While there were many issues that the two wings agreed on, by 1957, there was much more that separated them.

The main conflict of the mid-1950s was over the degree to which the Labor government should deliver beneficial industrial policies to its own organisational supporters. In other words, the background context of the dispute could be reduced to different ideological or philosophical appreciations of the role of a working-class government. Would Labor be motivated more by the broader responsibilities of governing the state or remain attached to its original ideals of sectoral promotion? Should a Labor government (the political executive) be *made to* implement the official policy of the party? In political terms, the conflict became a fight between perceptions of the ‘state interest’ (sometimes referred to as ‘parliamentarianism’) and notions of ‘class interest’ (alternatively known as ‘labourism’).

The parliamentary or political wing represented mainly the right of the labour movement and they generally believed that a Labor government should govern in the wider interests of the state as they saw them. This group was strongest in the Labor cabinet of Vince Gair. On the left, the industrial wing consisted of the union movement (with the support of some parliamentarians), which tended to display a more militant approach to class politics. Their prime loyalty was to the interests of the labour movement as organised through the Trades and Labour Council (TLC) and they tended to be well represented in the internal organs of the party (executive committee, branches and factions). This extra-parliamentary wing believed that Labor governments were elected as working-class delegates to govern in the interests of their own supporters by transforming labour platforms into state policy. It was not a surprise that many issues on which Labor governments were called to act caused some tension between these two competing orientations to class politics. Usually such tensions were defused or contained, but in 1957 an industrial dispute over the issue of increasing annual leave for the state’s workers culminated in the most acrimonious split between these two wings of the party.

The situation in Queensland was not the only contributing factor in the lead-up to the rupture. For some years, the Catholic Church throughout Australia had been concerned about growing communist influence in the trade unions; it regarded such influence as a challenge to its own authority in society. Most members of the Catholic ‘flock’ in Australia were working-class families of Irish or Italian stock. Senior Catholics regarded communist leaders in the unions as

atheistic revolutionaries intent on social change and industrial militancy. To challenge the communists, the Catholics formed the Catholic political 'Movement' and began to contest control of key unions. In the union movement, these Catholic organisers were known as 'Industrial Groupers'—Catholic agitators who grouped together and formed anti-communist factions. The Movement also hoped to be able to wrest control of the ALP from left-wing and communist-oriented leaders. Already in Victoria, the ALP had split principally on the issue of communist control of the union movement and influence in Labor politics. A breakaway faction largely aligned with the Catholic Church had formed the Democratic Labor Party (DLP) in Victoria in 1955.

Fallout from this Catholic–communist struggle in the union movement began to impact on other states, including Queensland, from the early 1950s. In the Queensland branch of the ALP, however, the Catholics were already well represented in the party and in state government. The Premier was avowedly Catholic, as was a majority of his ministry, and many backbenchers in the Gair government were similarly of that faith. Ostensibly, these committed Catholics (and to some extent the Catholic Church as a whole) then wielded enormous influence in Queensland and had nothing to gain from splitting the ALP and forming a breakaway party. Catholics, however, exercised far less influence in the union movement although they were represented in some key unions such as the AWU. The leader of the AWU, R. J. 'Joe' Bukowski, had been a long-time opponent of communist influence in the union movement and had been active in supporting early Movement activities in Queensland aimed at 'cleaning out' communist sympathisers from union positions—especially in provincial Queensland and the sugar industry. There was also a longstanding feud between the AWU and the left-wing TLC unions dating back to the 1920s.

The immediate politics of the situation also played a crucial part. Personalities and personal feuding were other explosive ingredients in the 1957 split. The Gair ministry had governed Queensland from January 1952 and had been comfortably re-elected twice—in March 1953 and May 1956. Premier Gair was gruff and egotistical, and in his political style was often dictatorial and uncompromising, very much following in the mould of his predecessors; but, unlike his predecessors, Gair was the first Labor Premier to refuse to accept the conventional AWU membership and instead chose membership of the Clerks' Union—perhaps as a way of asserting his independence (Moroney 1983:3). Many contemporaries considered him a 'little tin god' who preferred to do things his own way (Galloghy Interview, 1998). His deputy and long-term Transport Minister, Jack Duggan, a non-Catholic, was bright, able and particularly forceful in debate but increasingly troubled by the directions the Labor cabinet was taking—particularly the stand-off between the contending party and parliamentary leaderships. Labor's Treasurer, Ted Walsh, a Catholic

and firm Gair supporter, was capable and loyal and concerned about holding the cabinet together. Apart from Duggan, all the other ministers would side with the Premier in the eventual schism and oppose the directions of the wider party organisation.

If it takes two to tango, personalities were also important on the extra-parliamentary side of the labour movement. The industrial wing of the labour movement (composed of the main Trades Hall unions and the AWU) was the decisive power within the Labor Party. The party's governing body, the QCE, was dominated by strong and forceful personalities from the main unions who had themselves risen through the rough and tumble of union disputes and were used to getting their own way. The two most powerful AWU leaders were Jack Schmella (Secretary of the QCE since 1952 and an ex-AWU officer) and Joe Bukowski (AWU Secretary and President of the ALP since 1956). The Trades Hall group consisted of a more numerous body of union leaders, of whom the most prominent were: Fred Newton (Building Workers' Union), Jack Egerton (Boilermakers' Society) and Jack Devereux (Amalgamated Engineering Union) (see MacGregor 1991:57–60). Even though many of these union leaders had their own differences, they gradually combined into an anti-Gair coalition, coming to the conclusion that 'Gair must go'—a deliberate campaign that, according to one conservative commentator of the day, was 'pursued with a ruthlessness and relentlessness which had obscured in the minds of those responsible the inevitable consequences of their own actions' (Lack 1962:475).

Significantly, all the main protagonists of the unfolding dispute were from the Labor side of politics. Their political opponents were mere bystanders. Both the Country and Liberal Party leaders were entirely marginal in the demise of the government and became significant players only when they were suddenly catapulted into office in the aftermath of the split.

## **Immediate catalysts of the Labor split**

In the immediate chain of events leading to the split, relations between the two wings of the party had broken down even before the 1956 election. In February 1955, the ALP's federal executive voted to expel the pro-Grouper 'old' Victorian state executive just before the March interstate conference in Hobart. Premier Gair caused some disquiet among the wider Queensland party when he (along with four others of the six-member Queensland delegation) initially attended the ALP's federal convention but then withdrew in protest against the federal executive. As a Catholic with some 'Grouper' sympathies, Gair had opposed the purging of Grouper organisers in the party in February, and then in March tried to have the executive's expulsion of the Victorians reopened at the conference.

When this failed, Gair led a boycott of the interstate conference and returned with most of the delegation to Queensland. Gair protested against the principle of the 'unconstitutional' expulsion and proposals to begin wider purges of those ALP members with suspected Grouper or breakaway DLP affiliations. For his renegade actions, Gair was subsequently censured by 19 affiliated Queensland unions, although a formal motion of no confidence in his leadership put to the QCE was narrowly defeated. Against such tactics, Gair managed to orchestrate a vote of confidence from his parliamentary colleagues in a Caucus ballot—a tactic he would exploit again in defiance of the executive's position.

In September 1955, the QCE requested cabinet introduce amendments to the *Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act* to allow for three weeks' annual leave (increasing paid holidays by a further week—a policy first adopted at the 1953 convention in Rockhampton). Cabinet considered this request but refused to accede—and indeed voted unanimously to reject the proposal. Gair, in particular, felt that the state could not afford to implement a decision in support of an additional week's annual leave for all workers. This put Gair along with his entire cabinet in headlong collision with the central executive of the ALP (as the Deputy Premier, Jack Duggan, had also initially been opposed to granting the three weeks' annual leave). In November, the QCE again raised the matter and asked the government to reconsider its opposition to granting the additional week's holiday. In January 1956, however, the parliamentary Caucus voted by 30 to 19 to again reject the proposal. Frustrated by the delays and lack of response to its requests, the QCE decided to put the matter to the 1956 State Convention to be held in Mackay in late February and early March (a body that was dominated by the industrial wing of the party). In Mackay, the convention not only passed a resolution to instruct the parliamentary party to implement three weeks' annual leave, it instructed it to do so by a specified time (directing legislative amendments to proceed in 1956 with the provision to apply from 1 January 1957).

As often is the case with state premiers, Gair began to think of himself as infallible and not to be crossed. Once he had decided on a course of action, he began to resent any challenge to his authority. He genuinely felt affronted by the notion that his government was supposed to abide by and implement official decisions taken by the wider Labor Party and labour movement. Instead, he sought to exercise greater autonomy so that the political executive could administer the state as it saw fit and not be subordinate to extra-parliamentary forces. Gair was adamant that, although he was not in principle opposed to three weeks' annual leave, as premier, he could not and would not grant such a request at that particular time. In his defence, he invoked the principle that parliament is supreme and that members should not be 'subjected to outside coercion, intimidation, or direction' (Lack 1962:445). At the Mackay convention, Gair told

delegates that an emergency meeting of the Labor cabinet had again rejected the 'direction' from the convention. Cabinet regarded such demands as contrary to the philosophy of responsible government in which ministers were subject to the state constitution and answerable to the electorate. In secret conciliation talks after the convention, however, some compromise was apparently reached with Gair and Duggan, which implied that the government would move in the next session of parliament (that is, after the state elections) to introduce three weeks' annual leave (Lack 1962:448).

With the May 1956 election over and Labor returned (helped by some campaign issues such as legalisation of off-course betting and the unpopularity of the federal Coalition government under Robert Menzies), the annual leave conflict quickly resurfaced within the party. Meanwhile, Labor began the new session of parliament dogged by a series of contentious issues, which in turn produced a number of political and 'tactical errors' eventually weakening the Premier's position (Hughes 1956:481–2). A reduction by the Industrial Court to the shearing rate of pay to take effect from 1 January 1956 proved a bloody and bitter battle when the shearers imposed 'black bans' on wool shorn at the new rate. After nine months of the strike, the Premier antagonised unionists by collaborating with the federal Coalition government in stationing troops on Brisbane's waterfront to move wool bales declared 'black' by shearers. This was accompanied by a major rift between the cabinet and the AWU over the Royal Commission into Land Administration involving the corrupt conduct of a Minister of the Crown (the former Lands Minister, Tom Foley), who was demoted in the ministry and eventually expelled from the ALP for his corrupt activities. The AWU paper, *The Worker*, sparked the scandal by publishing allegations about corruption in the administration of leasehold land. The subsequent royal commission found the minister guilty of corrupt conduct, but meanwhile, a senior public servant, Vivian R. Creighton, was dismissed from his post as Chairman of the Lands Administration Commission for providing information about the case to the union. With some AWU and union support, Creighton appeared before the bar of the Parliament to explain his actions, but cabinet steadfastly refused to reinstate him.

These controversies were followed by further examples of the injudicious use of state power in specific legislation, which, according to Hughes (1956:482), caused the government to lose the 'good will of many middle class supporters of the ALP'. Such legislation included amendments to the *University of Queensland Act*, which increased government influence over the university and over staff appeal mechanisms, and the contentious Motor Spirits Distribution Bill (see below). Gair also further annoyed the AWU by sacking Dr Felix Dittmer, the ALP Member for Mount Gravatt, from the University of Queensland Senate.

Dittmer, a one-time staunch supporter of Gair, was sacked because he had supported the industrial wing's attempt to force the government to implement legislation providing three weeks' annual leave.

Such conflicts between the AWU and the government eventually forced the AWU back into the arms of the TLC. Although it had disaffiliated in 1939, it now renewed its affiliation in July 1956 (but then disaffiliated again between 1958 and 1961). It appeared that Gair had foolishly lost the support of the party's industrial wing (and some of the parliamentary wing) and created a united combination of former enemies. In short, there was no single issue that precipitated the split, but a succession of issues and intense personality clashes, which contributed to the final breakdown. As the rift deepened, the rival camps were divided between pro-Gair supporters and anti-Gair opponents. Gair became both the essential and symbolic issue of the split. Religion and ideology were not fundamental catalysts of the dispute. Conflicts between the Catholics and non-Catholics or between communists and non-communists were associated more with the after-effects of the split—consequences rather than causes.

After Labor's Caucus voted on two separate occasions to rebuff the executive's direction to introduce three weeks' annual leave, the Caucus offered to meet the QCE to resolve the issue through a conference consisting of a parliamentary delegation and a subcommittee of the QCE. This token was accepted by the QCE only on the assurance that the other contentious pieces of legislation (the *University of Queensland Amendment Act* and the *Motor Spirits Distribution Bill*) be delayed for further consultation. Not surprisingly, by this stage, the appointed conference failed to resolve the issue, but not before relations between Gair and Duggan had irretrievably broken down. During the negotiations, Duggan, who now headed the industrial wing in the Caucus, had broken the convention of cabinet solidarity by revealing to the press that he had opposed the Motor Spirits Bill, claiming that despite being Transport Minister it was introduced over his objections, that it was a 'Gair baby' and was the 'rottenest piece of legislation ever brought down in State Parliament' (Hughes 1956:483; Lack 1962:464). In response, Gair told reporters that cabinet had effectively censored Duggan for his indiscretions and breach of solidarity. In this heated atmosphere, the full QCE moved a motion of no confidence in Gair on 18 April 1957—a motion that succeeded this time by a vote of 35 to 27. The motion required the Premier to 'show cause why he should not be expelled from the Party' because of his 'defiance' of Labor's ruling body and persistence in refusing to accept ALP directives and rules. He was also accused of breaking 'the pledge which he and all other members of the party are required to sign, and which pledges them to uphold the policy and platform of the party' (see Lack 1962:472). At the QCE meeting, Deputy Premier Duggan voted against the motion—out of solidarity with a cabinet colleague and in an attempt to extend a lifeline to the Premier.

Gair was not one to take such actions lying down. He countered the QCE's gambit by seeking a motion of confidence from cabinet, which he received on 23 April. The motion of confidence from the whole cabinet was divided into three parts and stated

1. that it has complete confidence in the Premier, and recognises the distinction with which he has led the Party, and his outstanding work as head of the Executive Government
2. that at no time, or on any matter, has the Premier done other than execute the decisions arrived at by Cabinet in accordance with the principle of Cabinet responsibility
3. that, therefore, Cabinet regards as a matter of the utmost gravity the attempt being made to impose on the Premier responsibility for decisions to which we individually and jointly subscribed, and to which we adhere. And, we, the undersigned members of Cabinet, wish it known that any punitive action by way of expulsion, suspension, or otherwise, taken against the Premier will therefore be regarded as having been taken against each Minister individually. (See citation in *QPD* 1957:vol. 217, p. 44; Lack 1962:473)

All members of cabinet personally signed the motion to confirm their support. Gair's deputy, Jack Duggan, however, in signing his agreement, wrote in the margin 'with the exception of the final paragraph, I agree'—meaning that he was prepared to support the intent of the first two sections of the motion but not the third. This was because Duggan was not prepared to either resign or be expelled personally in the event Gair was subject to 'any punitive action' from the QCE. Some other members of the ministry (such as Ted Walsh) 'pleaded' with Duggan to support the motion fully, reminding him that he was the next most likely leader of the party and that he should stand fully behind Gair. While Duggan was prepared to express his confidence in Gair as premier, he was not prepared to be expelled from the ALP in the event that Gair was expelled. This 'virtually unanimous' endorsement from cabinet was followed later that day by a more qualified endorsement of Gair from the entire Labor Caucus, which expressed 'unqualified support' for the Premier by a vote of 26 to 21—a very qualified or lukewarm form of support for a serving premier. These votes ostensibly shored up Gair's premiership in his duel with the party executive, and to some extent the level of support the Premier managed to attract came as a surprise to the industrial wing in the QCE. Nevertheless, the signs were already apparent that Gair's days as premier were numbered.

The 'Gair must go' campaign within the Labor Party gathered momentum. Gair was summoned to appear before the QCE to explain his actions and answer a

list of charges against him. These charges represented a backlog of grievances against the Premier—some of which, taken in isolation, would not have led to his removal as party leader. The final straw for the 'Gair must go' group appears to have been Gair's success in rallying support for his stand in cabinet and to a lesser extent in the parliamentary Caucus. The last charge made against the Premier refers to his 'organising and arranging the issue of a statement by cabinet which is a direct challenge to the Queensland Central Executive and undoubtedly political blackmail of the most vicious type' (QCE 1957 cited in Lack 1962).

Gair attended the QCE hearing on 24 April 1957 and, after a marathon five-hour debate, was expelled from the ALP for 'his continued refusal to accept ALP rules and platform'. Shortly before 8pm, the QCE voted by 35 to 30 to expel Gair. The author of the preceding volume of the history of the Queensland Parliament, Clem Lack, was so incensed at Gair's treatment that he wrote with some hyperbole:

For the first time in the history of democratic government the Premier of a State was placed on trial by a political organisation not responsible to the electorate, and his accusers also constituted the judges and the jury. There was no precedent in constitutional history for such a situation. (Lack 1962:473)

It is a moot point whether the 'Premier was placed on trial', whether Gair as party leader was called to account as a member of the Labor Party or whether there was no precedent to such an action. According to Lack, Gair in his own defence was more appreciative of the tension between two rival commitments. On the one hand, ALP members had pledged themselves to abide by the party's policy and platforms, but on the other hand, Ministers of the Crown had taken an oath of office to administer the state 'in the interests of the peace and welfare of all citizens'. Gair's personal predicament involved the difficulties in attempting to reconcile these competing affiliations when they apparently collided. In Lack's (1962:475) account of his oral defence, Gair responded that

[i]n such a moment of grave choice, [one] had no alternative in conscience. For a moment [party] tradition must be laid aside, as it had so often been laid aside in the times of national crisis, when the welfare of all must precede the welfare of some...How easy, how terribly easy to make the convenient decision, even though it was the wrong decision, and how hard, how terribly hard, to make the difficult decision, even if it were the right decision!

The QCE was unconvinced and with a small majority succeeded in voting for Gair's removal from the party. Gair responded on 26 April by assembling his

ministerial and parliamentary supporters (totalling 25) and announcing their intention of forming a new Queensland Labor Party (QLP). Duggan was the only minister not to join the QLP. A small group began to draft a constitution and rules for the new party and Gair made it clear that the QLP would not affiliate with the largely Catholic DLP formed in Victoria in 1955.

Deputy Premier Duggan, who had been among the most conciliatory among the cabinet, eventually broke ranks with the rest of his cabinet colleagues and supported the ALP executive's decision. He resigned his portfolio as minister on 29 April rather than side with the 'deviationists' and be expelled from the ALP. The day before, on 28 April, he made a passionate radio address to the public on the ALP-owned radio station 4KQ, in which he made the notorious comment:

There is only one decision to reach on the matter. Whether you like it or not, whether it is wise or unwise, the course to take is to endorse the official Labor decision. That is where Duggan stands—and where every true genuine Labor man stands and will continue to stand. (Hughes 1980:60)

Duggan was later reported to have said that he stood by the party's decision whether it was 'right, wrong, wise or unwise' (*Sunday Mail*, 1 May 1966). Gair embellished the statement even further, claiming Duggan had said 'sound or unsound, right or wrong, wise or unwise, I shall give effect to the decisions of the QCE' (*QPD* 1957:vol. 217, p. 31). His political opponents frequently used these deliberate misinterpretations of his words to damage his credibility and undermine his integrity. Hughes (1980:60) has claimed Coalition politicians 'conveniently misquoted' Duggan as saying 'wise or unwise, right or wrong' and, although inaccurate, the phrase subsequently stuck in the public's mind and entered the folklore of the political history of the state. Duggan was also later blamed in some quarters for 'precipitating the 1957 Labor split' because 'he refused to follow his Premier, Mr V. Gair, and his remaining nine cabinet colleagues in bucking a directive from the Queensland Central Executive' (Higgins 1961:15). The accusation that Duggan 'precipitated' the conflict tends, however, to exaggerate his role in the dispute, overlooks his conciliatory attempts and conveniently ignores the roles played by other key protagonists such as Gair and the QCE leaders.

In the immediate aftermath of the expulsion, Gair, as head of a minority government, continued as premier and as the head of cabinet. He replaced Duggan with Tom Moores as Minister of Transport and the Treasurer, Ted Walsh, became Gair's deputy (this was a quirk of fate as Walsh had earlier been deputy leader but had lost the position to Gair after he lost his seat for a term in 1947). The minority QLP government remained in a precarious position, which in effect could be maintained only for a period while the Parliament was not in

session. When the Parliament resumed, Gair would either lose the confidence of the House and be forced to resign or negotiate some expedient coalition across the Chamber, perhaps with the conservative parties. Gair met with the Leader of the Opposition, Frank Nicklin, on 30 April, but no formal negotiations about a Labor–Country coalition were ever publicly admitted. Nicklin later denied that he had entertained any discussions with Gair about the possibility of exchanging support and sustaining the QLP ministry in office. Stevenson (1985), however, in a political biography of Nicklin, presents some evidence suggesting the ‘first impulse’ of the Opposition Leader was to assist Gair and that Nicklin’s claim that no approach was made to him was false. Stevenson (1985:3–14) found

one item in the Nicklin papers consists of a press cutting...showing which of these [Labor parliamentarians] had joined the Gair and Duggan groupings. One of the annotations is revealing, as it shows one of the options that had crossed Nicklin’s mind: ‘carry on for a while / endeavour secure something in return for support—union controlled ballots—redistribution’. Sir Gordon Chalk has confirmed that there was a liaison between Nicklin and Gair during which the ‘carrots’ of court-controlled ballots for industrial unions and electoral distribution were discussed. He adds that a coalition between the two was never seriously contemplated.

The federal Country Party leader, Arthur Fadden, a former prime minister and serving Treasurer, also wrote that he had had to counsel Nicklin from joining Gair in a cobbled Labor–Country coalition. Fadden believed that the Country Party’s interests would be better served by allowing the QLP government to collapse and for a new election to be held in which the two Labor Parties would be at each other’s throats.

With questions arising about the capacity of the QLP to govern and maintain the confidence of the Legislative Assembly, the State Administrator, Justice Alan Mansfield (deputising for the Governor), insisted on recalling the Parliament for the purpose of testing whether the government could pass supply. Without supply, the state government would run out of money and would be forced to resign, leading to the formation of a new ministry or more likely to fresh elections. The Administrator issued his proclamation on 14 May in order for the Parliament to be recalled on 11 June 1957; the session lasted but one and a half days before the House adjourned and, on 13 June, the thirty-fourth Parliament was dissolved.

## The supply debate and the downfall of the Gair government

The second session of the thirty-fourth Parliament was opened on Tuesday 11 June 1957 without much fanfare and without the customary speech from the Governor opening the session. The Administrator merely issued a decree informing the members that ‘Parliament has been summoned to meet this day to consider the granting of Supply to Her Majesty and such other matters as may be brought before you’. His Excellency also expressed his desire for the Assembly to ‘proceed forthwith to the consideration of the aforementioned business’ (*QPD* 1957:vol. 217, p. 1). Few of the participants expected the parliamentary session to endure for long. Within two days, the QLP government had been brought down by the Parliament’s refusal to pass the Supply Bill.

When the Assembly met at noon, there was acrimony and confusion between the divided Labor Parties and an immediate jockeying for position among rival party leaders. After Gair informed the House that Duggan had resigned as Minister for Transport and that Tom Moores had been appointed as replacement, Duggan rose to his feet to inform the House that he had been elected parliamentary leader of the ALP. Duggan was technically the leader of the largest non-government party in the Chamber (having 24 members to the Country Party’s 16). At this point, the Country Party leader, Frank Nicklin (as the standing Opposition Leader), raised a point of order, questioning whether Duggan was implying that he should become Leader of the Opposition. The Speaker, John Mann (ALP, Brisbane and a Duggan supporter), initially ruled that according to Westminster conventions, the non-government party with the ‘greatest numerical strength in the House’ should be the opposition and that where any dispute arose the Speaker would make a ‘final and conclusive’ determination (*QPD* 1957:vol. 217, p. 2). Mann then ruled that

in view of the composition of the three parties, namely, the Liberal Party with eight members, the Country Party with 16 members and the Australian Labour Party with 24 members, I have decided that the Australian Labour Party is the party with the greatest numerical strength in opposition to Her Majesty’s Government. (*QPD* 1957:vol. 217, p. 2)

The situation was further complicated by the fact that neither of the party groupings could claim the greatest numerical strength in that both had 24 members each if the conservative parties were counted together. Moreover, if the ALP retained the speakership, the numbers on the floor of the Assembly were 24 to the Coalition and 23 to the ALP.

The Country Party leader dissented from the Speaker's ruling and, after a set of terse interchanges among the more voluble members, moved an extraordinary motion (all the more so in light of subsequent tensions that developed in the relations between the two conservative parties). It was an overtly political motion designed to split the old Labor ranks and get the Gair ministry to support the Nicklin-led coalition. It also sought to preserve the additional privileges and entitlements of those serving in the senior ranks of the opposition. The motion read:

That this House resolves that the Country Party and the Liberal Party shall be recognised by this House as being, and as having been since the commencement of this Thirty-fourth Parliament, one united party for all Parliamentary purposes, and that the officers notified to this House on 1 August, 1956, as being the Leader of the Opposition, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the Opposition Whip, and the Opposition Secretary respectively, shall be recognised by this House as being... the officers duly and properly entitled to the aforesaid offices and any salary, emolument, privilege, or entitlement attendant thereon, and that this Resolution be and be deemed to be an Order of this House within the meaning of Standing Order 333. (*QPD* 1957:vol. 217, p. 3)

Frank Nicklin and the Liberal leader, Ken Morris, both spoke from well-prepared notes in support of the motion. Duggan opposed the opposition's motion, stating that the ALP was the largest single party and that he supported secretarial aid to each of the main parties to assist them in their work. The ALP's new deputy, Dr Felix Dittmer (Mount Gravatt), argued it was 'unfortunate that, with so many visitors assembled in the galleries, we should have such an unseemly scramble to retain for an hon. member an office to which he is not entitled'. Dittmer felt the QLP government members would not support the motion 'because they will be aware of the damage it must do to parliamentary procedure and prestige' (*QPD* 1957:vol. 217, p. 7). Tom Aikens (NQLP, Mundingburra) argued that the Assembly had always regarded the Country and Liberal Parties as being one party inside the Chamber—whatever the differences outside the House. He considered that 'we must in all fairness and decency continue to regard it as such' (*QPD* 1957:vol. 217, p. 11). The Treasurer, Ted Walsh, was 'amazed that so much time should be wasted on determining who should or should not be the Leader of the Opposition' (*QPD* 1957:vol. 217, p. 13). Towards the end of the debate, Alan Munro (Lib., Toowong), the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, claimed that the Coalition was a united entity despite the separate status of the two parties and he confirmed that the parties had fought the previous election campaign under a joint Liberal-Country Party coordinating committee, which

had ‘considerable powers’ over ‘many material areas at the time of the election’ (*QPD* 1957:vol. 217, p. 15). He also stated that a joint-party coordinating committee controlled the campaign in north Queensland.

The vote on the Opposition Leader’s motion was passed after a three-and-a-half hour procedural debate (at about 3.40pm) by 50 votes to 23. The Country and Liberal Parties in opposition were joined in support of the motion by the government (the Premier and his ministry and other QLP backbenches). Only the 23 members of the ALP sitting in the Chamber voted against Nicklin’s motion. The effect of the motion not only reaffirmed the status quo in the Parliament regarding the opposition, it rejected the Speaker’s ruling that the ALP was the largest single non-government party. It was effectively a no-confidence vote in the Speaker, but this was not the main game.

After the preliminary skirmish over the opposition, the Premier moved that the *Standing Orders* of the Parliament be suspended to allow the passing of supply to occur in one day. This was an extraordinary request made in extraordinary circumstances. The usual procedures laid out in the *Standing Orders* provided for a formal debate over the introduction of the budget followed by up to 17 sitting days of debate over the government’s estimates for which the Assembly sat as a Committee of the Whole. In other words, a budget would generally require a minimum of about five to six weeks if the Parliament sat for consecutive weeks; should any non-sitting weeks be included this would prolong the process.

Not surprisingly, the ALP leader, Jack Duggan, opposed the suspension of *Standing Orders*, calling instead for an immediate dissolution of the Parliament and a new state election. Stung by suggestions from his political opponents that he was merely ‘the leader of the deviationist party’, Duggan objected to the suspension of *Standing Orders* to enable the supply debate to be concluded in one day because he felt the QLP ministry lacked the support of the Queensland electorate. He was also fearful that in the event the opposition voted with the minority government to grant supply, Gair would continue in office for some time and have little reason to recall the Parliament once the appropriation had been passed. Duggan defended his objections with some passion:

We meet on what might be correctly termed a momentous occasion. It is an occasion which the people of this State have been following with increasing interest. Over recent weeks tension has mounted regarding this political crisis. Nobody in the Australian Labour Party is gleeful about the position; nobody in the Australian Labour Party is happy that this event has occurred within the party. No-one relishes the prospect of having to deal with colleagues with whom one has sat for many years and for many of whom they have a high regard. Because of that position it is not easy for those of us here to say that we will not approve the

resolution to be moved by the Premier. It is not because of any desire to prevent the Public Service from being paid. It is well known that if action had been taken, or even if action is taken now, that there will be ample time for the elections to be resolved and for Parliament to be convened and for Supply to be passed. We are sincere in the desire to have this matter determined by the electors and to make possible every facility for the people's voice to be heard. (*QPD* 1957:vol. 217, p. 18)

After a long speech interrupted continually by interjections, and with additional time extended to his case, Duggan finished with claims that the ALP was pledged to 'uphold the Christian way of life' and 'family life', that the next election would become highly charged with personal abuse and that when given the opportunity to have a say, the people of Queensland would 'send us back in numbers to this Parliament to uphold those things that some people are charging us with destroying' (*QPD* 1957:vol. 217, p. 24). In reply, the Treasurer spoke of the imperative of passing supply but spent most of his speech attacking the ALP leader. Frank Nicklin, however, putting the opposition's view, agreed with Duggan that an early dissolution of parliament was preferable but disagreed with the intention of opposing the suspension of *Standing Orders* to allow supply to be debated quickly. The opposition was anxious to hear from the Treasurer his 'case on Queensland's financial position. We propose to give him the opportunity by allowing *Standing Orders* to be suspended so that he can move a motion for Supply in Committee' (*QPD* 1957:vol. 217, p. 29). Nicklin stopped short of indicating at this stage whether the opposition would indeed give the QLP ministry support in such a motion for supply. The QLP ministry could secure supply if either the ALP or the Coalition parties was prepared to support the request—possibly in exchange for some other political commitments.

The Premier concluded the debate on his own motion—claiming he had not foreseen any opposition to his request—thinking that the real debate would be focused on the question of supply not on whether to bring on a truncated supply debate. Gair spent most of his speech attacking Duggan personally, describing his former minister's speech as a 'hysterical outburst' that showed the 'would-be Premier' had descended to a 'low standard today' (*QPD* 1957:vol. 217, p. 30). Gair was incensed by Duggan's criticism of Gair's wife speaking at public meetings in support of the QLP. He also criticised Duggan for not standing up to principle, but rather for kowtowing to union leaders who threatened the preselection of Caucus members. Gair concluded his attack on Duggan by stating that

these men round me were prepared to stand for a principle. They were not going to be directed as to when legislation should be introduced if we believed that the time was not propitious. You, Mr Speaker, know as

well as I that there were times when this matter was discussed by the Parliamentary Labour Party and that the party was unanimous that the time was not opportune, but when big Boss Joe [Bukowski] and others started to wield their whips, we saw the way they went. When they were threatened with refusal of endorsement or withdrawal of endorsement and they feared losing their jobs, they said, 'To hell with principle; we must look after this job, it is the best we ever had and we will not get another one like it?' By their actions they imperilled the Parliamentary system of Government. (*QPD* 1957:vol. 217, p. 31)

When the Assembly voted on Gair's motion to suspend *Standing Orders*, the House divided and passed the motion 49 to 23 on party lines, with the Coalition siding with the Gair ministry against the ALP. Only Arthur Coburn (QLP, Burdekin), who voted in the earlier matter on the identification of the opposition, did not vote for the second motion to truncate the procedures to deal with supply.

Once the procedural formalities were removed, the Speaker, John Mann, read a message from the Administrator seeking supply to the Crown (Vote of Credit) of £27 million, whereupon he vacated the chair and the House went into committee to debate the Supply Bill. Treasurer Walsh, in presenting the bill, indicated that as an election was 'pending' and that the eventual government would require 'time to formulate its legislative programme, Parliament may not meet as early as usual'. This meant that while some salaries for officials (the Governor, judges, ministers, Members of Parliament and top public servants) and interest charges with respect to the public debt could be paid, the more general issue of 'supply and appropriation must be granted by Parliament to cover all other expenditure on Government services' (*QPD* 1957:vol. 217, p. 33). Walsh noted that £26.5 million had already been granted by a Vote on Account to see the government over to the end of August, but because of the likely delay in recalling parliament, he asked for a further two months' supply (of £27 million), ending on 31 October 1957—making a total of £53.5 million advanced for the next financial year. He then proceeded to launch into an attack on the ALP for its communist links, its secret 'pledge' that Members of Parliament had to sign and for the allegedly improper behaviour of its new leader (engaging in secret deals with oil companies over their opposition to the Motor Spirits Bill). Nicklin, following convention, presented the response by arguing that the state was virtually ungovernable and that the political mess had to be cleared up. He described the Treasurer's speech as an extraordinary mixture of recrimination and inter-party squabbling that was irrelevant to the question being debated. He accused Walsh of spending only a 'few minutes' on the state's finances and trying to 'get his money on the blind' by not providing any justification for the proposed increase in expenditure. Nicklin argued:

[I]rrespective of the strange happenings on the introduction of the Appropriation Bill history is certainly being made in the Chamber today. This session of Parliament will probably go down as one of the shortest on record, but it will not be recorded in the history of the State because of its brevity but rather on account of the impact which our actions today will have on future generations of Queenslanders and the future advancement of this great State...What is happening to the best State in Australia at the present time? We have not got a Government; the affairs of Government are being neglected, and the administration of the State is being neglected because the Ministers and other members and ex-members of the Labour Party are not concerned with getting on with their job but with the fight one against the other...On an occasion like this one would expect the Treasurer to give some indication of what the intentions of the Government are. Will the Government attempt to carry on, or what will they do? It is no use coming here and asking this House for a certain sum of money...He did not make any attempt to justify an additional supply, so there is evidently no need for it; and we are not going to be a party to giving the Government one penny piece above the supply they already have. (*QPD* 1957:vol. 217, p. 47)

Then, more threateningly, referring to Walsh's promise to provide more details on the budget at a later date, Nicklin bit back in asserting 'the hon. the Treasurer did say that he would be coming to prepare future Budgets for us. We can do that quite well. We have men on this side of the Chamber who can prepare a better Budget than ever the hon. gentleman produced' (*QPD* 1957:vol. 217, p. 47).

As the supply debate rolled on, the main protagonists each rose to their feet to vent their spleen and defend their own political positions. Duggan spoke against granting further supply, saying, 'I agree with the Leaders of the Opposition that we say to the people as quickly as possible...“throw out these men who are masquerading as great crusaders, these men who say that they are preserving democracy, these men who claim that they represent Christian principles”' (*QPD* 1957:vol. 217, pp. 52–3). The independent Tom Aikens also rejected the government's request for supply, which he considered was merely 'political thimble and pea demonstrations' to hide the fact that the government did not want to go to an election (*QPD* 1957:vol. 217, pp. 52–3).

When the House resumed the next day, the Premier defended his decision not to call an immediate election because the electoral rolls were not yet all printed—and to taunts from interjecting members, he refused to indicate a date for a state poll. After this statement, a succession of speakers poured scorn on the government and indicated that they would oppose the granting of additional supply. The list of non-government speakers opposing supply included Ken

Morris and Tom Hiley from the Liberals. No further Country Party members made a major speech. From the ALP, Jim Donald, Felix Dittmer, Les Wood, Pat Hanlon, Frank Forde, Eric Lloyd, Joe Dufficy and Cecil Jesson all opposed supply, while a group led by the QLP ministers supported the motion from the government's side: Paul Hilton, Bill Moore, Harry Gardner, Bill Power, Michael Brosnan and Alex Skinner. As the debate wore on, it became clear that the Gair government did not have the numbers to pass supply. The end became inevitable.

The final vote on supply took place at 10.30pm on Wednesday 12 June. The government voted in favour of granting interim supply but could muster only 25 votes. The combined vote against was 45, representing an unholy alliance of the ALP, the Country and Liberal Parties with the independent Aikens. After hearing the result, the Premier informed the Speaker that

in view of the adverse vote just taken in Committee of Supply I now wish to state that I propose calling on His Excellency the Administrator of the Government as early as possible to inform him that Supply was asked for by my Government and it has been refused by this House. (QPD 1957:vol. 217, p. 121)

The Premier's statement was not, however, the final act of the outgoing Parliament. After Gair's announcement, one of the senior Liberal members, Tom Hiley, rose to move an extraordinary motion seeking to disallow the proclamations of the *Motor Spirits Distribution Act*, which were to come into effect on 1 August 1957. His motion was based on the argument that an outgoing government 'under sentence of death' should not seek to extend administrative proclamations beyond the 'period during which they knew they could retain the mandate of the people' (QPD 1957:vol. 217, p. 122). Hiley was supported by Nicklin and Duggan, giving the motion the support of the three parties that combined to block supply. Gair and four of his ministers spoke against the motion, pointing out that the Parliament had earlier passed the proclamations by a vote of 42 to 23 and as such they should stand. The QLP ministers became acrimonious in their remarks and accused the ALP of political hypocrisy, of being a splinter party of former colleagues now drunk with political power and of 'lining up with the traditional enemies of Labour to help in the destruction of a Labour Government that has been in power for 25 years' (QPD 1957:vol. 217, p. 125). The ALP was also accused of siding with the oil companies to preserve their economic interests against the will of a parliament anxious to regulate oil distribution. The debate was largely polemic and the final vote mirrored the earlier vote over supply, with 43 supporting the motion and only 24 government members opposed. The motor spirits proclamations ceased to have effect.

The House adjourned at 11.40pm on Wednesday 12 June. The adjournment signalled the end of an era of consecutive Labor governments. The refusal of supply by the Queensland Parliament also meant that a further substantive issue had been added to the Labor split occurring throughout Australia: in Queensland, a Labor Party had brought down a Labor government.

## **The 1957 state election: a four-way contest**

Only 14 months since the last election, Queenslanders were back at the polls. The date set for the election was 3 August 1957 and writs were issued for each of the 75 Assembly seats. Under the electoral laws of the day, the election was fought on a simple majority 'first-past-the-post' basis, which meant that with two parties representing the Coalition and Labor split into two rival camps, the election became a four-way contest. Although the state-wide election campaign took the form of a four-way contest, the official Country and Liberal Parties did not challenge each other in any seat (although independent conservatives and independent liberal candidates did stand against their fellow parties). In contrast, the two Labor Parties stood against each other in 57 seats—most of which had been Labor seats in the previous parliaments. By challenging each other under the 'first-past-the-post' system, the Labor Parties risked splitting the 'Labor' vote and ceding seats to the conservatives by default.

In the 1957 election, 216 candidates stood (60 more than in 1956). Four seats were uncontested in the polls (receiving only one nomination: three by the Country Party and one by the Liberals). In only nine seats were the voters given the choice of a single conservative candidate challenged by a single Labor opponent. In contrast, there were 20 seats in which the Country Party was challenged by both the ALP and the QLP. In another four seats, a joint Country-Liberal candidate was challenged by both Labor Parties, and in 28 seats, the Liberal Party was challenged by both Labor Parties. In one seat, Clayfield, a Liberal candidate was challenged by a conservative rival—with no Labor candidates standing—and in another seat (Cunningham), a Country Party candidate was challenged by a conservative opponent. Only in Darlington (later renamed Logan) did an approximate four-way contest develop with candidates from the ALP, Country Party, an 'independent' Liberal and a non-aligned independent.

The principal theme of the campaign was who was capable of governing Queensland. The 'Labor Parties' focused on the rights and wrongs of the recent split and attempted to keep their supporters loyal with various emotive pleas. The ALP attempted to promote the three weeks' annual leave issue that was behind the collapse of the Labor government. The QLP remained supportive of arbitration and court-controlled ballots in unions to attempt to stop rorting and

forms of political influence by organised political groups. The Coalition promised ‘sane, efficient and just government’ as well as constitutional protection of democratic and political rights, including property rights (governments would not be permitted to seek the ‘compulsory acquisition of property otherwise than on just terms’, as laid out in the *Australian Constitution*). All parties stressed decentralisation, regional development and rural investment schemes and various forms of state savings banking.

The QLP stressed that a vote for it would ‘keep Queensland safe for democracy’, but its attack on the ALP was strident. In one election poster, the QLP urged voters to

choose whether you will be ruled by your own elected representatives in Parliament, answerable only to you OR whether you want government by remote control from Dunstan House [the ALP’s headquarters] and the Trades Hall. A Government led by Duggan and Dittmer would be a puppet government, masquerading under the label of Labor. It would take its orders from ‘Big Boss’ Bukowski, dictator of the QCE and his henchmen. Duggan has admitted that no matter what orders are given him by the QCE he will carry them out, RIGHT or WRONG, WISE or UNWISE. His sheep-like followers, Dittmer, Woods, Mann and the rest of them, are bound likewise by his decision. They must obey. Are these the men you would trust with the Government of Queensland? Weak, spineless men, who, to save their political skins are willing to be the tools of left wing autocrats and their extremist urgers and camp followers. (QLP election poster, 1957, Brisbane).

In other electoral material, the QLP ran a blatant scare campaign warning of a ‘Communist plan to govern Australia’ and ‘secret Red moves’ to bring about the amalgamation of the ALP and communist parties. They railed against ‘Marxist totalitarians’. The party particularly attacked the AWU leader, Joe Bukowski (who was not a communist), demanding that he be removed and promising to remove him by court-administered ballots if they were returned to government. The extra-parliamentary wing of the ALP was subjected to pointed attacks from the QLP leadership—with the intention of building the perception that the ALP leadership was guilty by association.

The ALP and Duggan attempted to defend themselves against the QLP accusations. They directly rebutted QLP accusations and attempted to correct ‘unashamed falsehoods in advertising’. This tactic risked extenuating attention to these issues and underscoring their significance in the public’s mind. Nevertheless, Duggan persisted with not only replying to accusations but forecasting negative campaign techniques his QLP opponents would make. He tried to argue that ‘the truth is, of course, that an unbridgeable gulf divides the political concepts

which are the basis of Labor's philosophy and the alien creed of Communism' and that 'intelligent people will not be deceived by such transparent humbug' (*Courier-Mail*, 8 July 1957). Duggan placed enormous faith in the intellect of voters.

The ALP invited the federal leader of the party, Dr Herbert V. Evatt, to address a mass rally in Brisbane on 28 July, which 1000 unionists and party workers attended. Along with Duggan, Evatt made a rousing speech in which he derided Gair's chances of forming government, arguing that voters could 'treat next Saturday as a referendum. A vote for the ALP is a "yes" vote in favour of three weeks leave' (*Courier-Mail*, 29 July 1957). The invitation to Evatt backfired, however, as conservative politicians used the visit to direct attention to the ALP's links with communism. Nicklin accused Duggan of trying to 'dissociate himself and his party from any taint of Communism or extreme left wing socialism, but behind the scenes he has been working hand-in-glove with these elements' (*Courier-Mail*, 30 July 1957). The fact that Evatt had appeared for communists in legal proceedings and had made public speeches supporting their right to exist legally gave some credence to the Coalition's claims.

Despite protestations, the issue of the ALP's close links with communists appeared to have grown in salience during the campaign. Not only were the other three major political parties all pushing this message, so too were religious leaders from the pulpit, among church gatherings and in church newspapers. During the election, the role of the Catholic Church did not attract significant attention (except in the case of a few candidates and the occasional broadcasts on the ALP's radio station), but afterwards ALP supporters directly accused Catholic Church leaders of campaigning for the QLP and using their influence to defeat the ALP (*Courier-Mail*, 7 August 1957). In Toowoomba, Duggan complained of a local 'campaign of character assassination' involving house-to-house canvassing by sectarian supporters of the QLP (*Courier-Mail*, 2 August 1957).

With the Labor Parties at each other's throats, the Coalition ran a low-key campaign focusing on the basics of state administration and parochial largesse. Its slogan drew inspiration from Churchill's wartime cry 'give us the opportunity and we will do the job'. The Country Party promised '4-D government': democratic government, decent government, development and decentralisation. Nicklin declared they would be a 'constructive government' and made promises to deliver many benefits to local communities such as commitments to build irrigation schemes.<sup>2</sup> Nicklin offered to continue and enhance free public hospitals and support preschool education. He also committed his government to end

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<sup>2</sup> 'Nicklin envisaged a network of small weirs throughout the state to boost primary industry' and new provincial abattoirs (see *Courier-Mail*, 1 August 1957).

victimisation and review any ‘dictatorial laws’ to remove any anti-democratic provisions in legislation (such as over petrol supplies, abattoirs, liquor and the *University Act*). He also promised to end the electoral malapportionment whereby electoral boundaries had been ‘gerrymandered by Labor with diabolical cunning...to keep Labor in power for so long’ (*Courier-Mail*, 1 August 1957).

The Liberal leader, Ken Morris, promised that the Coalition would not conduct a ‘witch-hunt’ in the public service, but promised reforms to the Public Service Commission and to public servants’ superannuation. He argued that only the Coalition could attract ‘huge capital investment’ into Queensland to develop the state. He and his deputy, Tom Hiley, promised better schools, free transport for children to school and increased public housing (*Courier-Mail*, 24 July 1957 and 3 August 1957). The Liberals made a point of rejecting any sectarian politicking or religious backing in the campaign, with Morris declaring ‘God forbid I should ever do so’ (*Courier-Mail*, 5 July 1957).

## **A fluke win: ‘governments may go and governments may come’**

In the watershed election of 1957, the Coalition received 43.66 per cent of the state-wide vote compared with the ALP’s 28.89 per cent and the QLP’s 23.39 per cent. The Country Party vote increased slightly from 126 183 in 1956 to 139 220 (or from 19.27 per cent to 19.99 per cent). The Liberal vote in fact fell from 164 116 to 162 372 (or down from 25.07 per cent to 23.23 per cent). With the two parties together, the vote for the Coalition increased by only 11 793 votes from 1956. In contrast, the ALP vote fell from 335 311 to 201 971 (or from 51.22 per cent to 28.95 per cent), while the QLP achieved a first-time vote of 163 534 votes (or 23.39 per cent). The combined ALP/QLP vote was 365 505, which was more than 60 000 greater than the combined Coalition vote.

In terms of seats, however, the result was very different. The Coalition increased its representation from 24 seats in the previous Parliament to 42 members in the 75-member Assembly—equivalent to a nine-seat majority (with the Country Party gaining 24 seats, up from 16 previously, and the Liberals securing 18, up from eight). On the other hand, the ALP’s representation fell from 49 seats to 20, with the loss of six sitting members from those who had remained with the party, including the party’s new leader, Jack Duggan, and deputy leader, Felix Dittmer, who both failed to hold their seats. The QLP had held 25 seats after the split but was reduced to 11 in the new Parliament. Two independents survived the contest, retaining their seats despite the general polarisation of the parties: the populist Tom Aikens, representing the self-proclaimed North Queensland Labor Party (NQLP), retained Townsville South (previously Mundingburra) and

continued to represent the same electorate until 1977, despite the renaming and redistribution of the seat. Arthur Coburn held on to Burdekin. These two were the last of the great surviving 'true independents'.

Due to the death of George Devries, the former Secretary for Mines, within the election period on 13 July, the election in the seat of Gregory was held over to 5 October (Devries had nominated for the seat before he died). At the by-election, the Country Party's Wallace Rae won the seat, beating Labor's Jack Duggan by 2075 votes to 1328, with the QLP candidate, K. Smith, finishing third with 955 votes. Although the Labor Party had a candidate for the seat who would have contested at the general election—the AWU's A. Watson—he withdrew to enable Duggan to have a chance to resume his parliamentary career. On this occasion, however, he was unsuccessful.

Political assessments of the change of government at the time suggested that the Coalition 'Nicklin–Morris government got into power in 1957 through a political miracle—the Labor Party split' (*Truth*, 11 March 1962). Others described its win as nothing more than a 'fluke' (*Courier-Mail*, 9 November 1967), in which electoral victory was thrown to the Coalition by a government in self-destruction mode. Indeed, many even among the Coalition had begun to doubt whether the non-Labor parties would ever win government. Joh Bjelke-Petersen (who felt slighted by Nicklin) later recalled in his memoirs that by the mid-1950s some among the Country Party had been disgruntled with Nicklin's leadership in opposition (by then Nicklin had served as Opposition Leader for more than 16 years—a remarkable feat in itself!). Bjelke-Petersen (1990:64) believed

the Labor split may have come just in time for him [Nicklin], for there had been rumblings against him among some of the Country Party backbenchers. They had been in Opposition so long that several of them were saying, 'We're never going to get out of the woods with Frank. Maybe it's time to try another man'. There was a feeling among them that Frank was simply too nice a man to lead them to victory over the Labor Party. If it had not been for the Labor split, he probably never would have.

In typical fashion, Bjelke-Petersen (1990:63) referred to the fortuitous turn of events in 1957 as a 'political godsend'.

Others were less moved by the change of government. The independent Member for Mundingburra, Tom Aikens, heralded the arrival of a new Coalition government in 1957 with the observation that 'governments may go and governments may come and empires may crumble into dust, but Tom Aikens goes on forever' (*QPD* 1957:vol. 218, p. 4). Certainly, such statements reflect the bravado of an outspoken maverick member, but from the vantage point of the

crossbenches Aikens highlighted a remarkable feature of Queensland politics. Despite the major disruption to the party system, Queensland governments tended to be marked more by continuity than substantial differences.

More generally, there was a growing consensus especially reflected in the press that the Coalition's win was long overdue and that they had soldiered on in opposition for long enough. Journalists wrote of the Coalition's main chance having come, acknowledging that after 25 years of Labor, the opposition had earned the right to a turn in government. There was also some cynicism and resignation shown among contemporary assessments: if the Labor Parties had demonstrated that they were clearly unable to govern competently then the Coalition had to be given the benefit of the doubt and installed as the alternative government. It is not an exaggeration to say that at the time there were few with high expectations of the likely performance of the Coalition in government and few who believed that the Country Party-led administration would survive for long once Labor sorted out its internal problems.

## **Nicklin's measured and subdued style of government**

If the Premier, Frank Nicklin, inherited government in 1957 by accident, he did not let that get in the way of his determination to govern. He had served as leader of the Country Party since June 1941, serving 16 years as Opposition Leader—a dubious record in the history of the State Parliament. Nicklin had contested and lost a staggering five elections in succession (1944, 1947, 1950, 1953 and 1956), which was quite a phenomenon and a record of failure that seems inconceivable today. By the late 1950s, Nicklin had become an old hand at elections and seemed to be tiring of campaigning. After 1956, he had to be persuaded to remain at the party's helm. And in the midst of the Labor government's momentous split (coming so soon after an election), Nicklin had briefly flirted with the idea of joining forces with the outgoing Premier, Vince Gair, to form a new government based on the Coalition parties together with most of the previous Labor ministry. If, however, he was ever serious about this course of action his Country Party colleagues dissuaded him from pursuing this course of events.

Like many Queensland premiers before and since, George Francis Reuben (Frank) Nicklin was not Queensland born. He was born in 1895 across the border in New South Wales in the sleepy hinterland town of Murwillumbah. He was educated at the local primary school and Highfield College Turrumurra (New South Wales) before enlisting in the Australian Imperial Forces to fight in World War I. While serving in France, he won a Military Medal for distinguished service,

received a commission and was ultimately promoted to lieutenant colonel. As a returned serviceman, Nicklin became a smallholding farmer, buying an 8-hectare pineapple farm at Palmwoods on the lower Sunshine Coast. In October 1922, he married Georgina Fleming. He entered politics by winning preselection for the safe Country Party seat of Murrumba—an electorate that stretched at the time from the outskirts of Brisbane (the Pine River at Redcliffe) through the Sunshine Coast hinterland to the Maroochy River at Maroochydore. Nicklin convincingly won the seat in the election of June 1932. In his personal life, Nicklin remained a keen sportsman and was renowned for his abstemiousness—being known to prefer pineapple juice for light refreshment. Unfortunately, his wife was seriously ill before he became Premier and, according to later press reports, 'was never really well enough to share fully in his public life. He was deeply grieved by her death, but he rarely mentioned it and threw himself into his duties. His sister Mrs Colin Lind, became his official hostess and has been a tower of strength' (*Courier-Mail*, 8 January 1968).

Reflecting Nicklin's personal style, the Coalition parties were tentative in office after winning government in 1957. Nicklin imbued his new government with a measured and subdued style of leadership in which consensus between the Coalition partners was an important principle. Collectively, they were acutely aware that the last conservative government had lasted one term (1929–32) and had been voted out at the first opportunity. Twenty-five years of continuous opposition had also bred caution. The Coalition government was intent on remaining in office for the long haul.

Showing a presence of mind and a determination to establish some basic ground rules for the new government, Nicklin established procedures to ensure the smooth functioning of the administration; he began as he meant to continue. Such procedures were important because they helped his inexperienced government make a smooth start. They also began to define the culture and character of the Coalition ministry by enabling internal conventions to guide not only decision making on policy questions but more importantly relations between the two Coalition parties.

Nicklin took to heart Walter Bagehot's observation that 'cabinet is the buckle' in Westminster systems that binds majority government together. Whereas Bagehot's metaphor implied a bond between the executive and the legislature, Nicklin was more concerned with cabinet acting as an expedient means of combining the two parties engaged in an uneasy coalition. Nicklin's cabinet was the buckle that joined the two parties and smoothed relations between the two parliamentary caucuses. If the organisational wings of the two parties differed or on occasions feuded, the cabinet was a sanctuary of calm and order and a place where partisan political interests were generally placed second to government interests. This did not mean that party ideologies or interests were absent from

cabinet but that whenever disagreements arose the cabinet members remained a team and demonstrated cabinet solidarity. In particular, the Premier and Deputy Premier, as the two leaders of the Coalition parties, worked assiduously to maintain a common and supportive alliance. They insisted that written notes would be taken of cabinet meetings and that these would be used as a record of decisions. Nicklin's cabinet was the first in Queensland to institute these procedures. Importantly, they also worked from the principle that cabinet had to agree to decisions and reach a consensus—and that the Coalition government would be in trouble if policies were to be routinely pushed through on the numbers of the senior Coalition partner. These were important principles of fairness and due process that could have been partly evident in previous ministries but that were now codified and observed.

## Conclusion

The bitter recriminations of the Labor split took years, even decades, to heal. Many of the protagonists on both sides of the 'Labor' divide were absolutely convinced of the correctness of their actions and positions. Few entertained any doubts about their own political stand or about the need to compromise. Retaining power within the organisation (even if it were a rump of its former size) appeared far more important than resolving differences and rebuilding a viable party. The loyal ALP leadership, including the AWU and Trades Hall union leaders, became more interested in exerting their control over the remnants of the Labor Party than in capturing government. Jack Duggan's wry observation that they would be out of office for 30 years appeared more and more a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The tumultuous year of 1957 provided a lifeline to Frank Nicklin, who, as the new Premier, steered Queensland politics into an era of conservative domination. The foundations on which Nicklin built the conservative regime would adapt and change but would eventually survive until December 1989. Over four consecutive parliaments (1957–68), Premier Frank Nicklin and his Country–Liberal Coalition underwent a longer-term transition, which saw it emerge as a formidable political force and the natural party of government. Chapters 3 and 4 recount this transition by focusing on the political history of the government parties in the Parliament. Chapter 5 then examines separately the legislative program of the Coalition government with an emphasis on how government business was steered through the Parliament. Meanwhile, the Labor opposition, as Chapter 6 records, went from being a disillusioned and fractured rump to a dispirited party seemingly content to remain indefinitely on the shadow benches. It was a spectacular fall from grace for a party that had held a hegemonic domination over Queensland politics for more than four decades.