

3. The early Nicklin years, 1957–1963

Queensland's Parliament during the early Nicklin years experienced considerable turmoil. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, successive parliaments did not resemble a traditional 'two-party adversarial' institution. The composition of the Assembly reflected the schisms of the 1957 Labor split and consisted of multiple parties together with independents or disaffected mavericks. The Parliament was a collection of disparate factions that had survived the tumultuous events of 1957. Many on the non-government benches were ex-ministers with long parliamentary experience and political acumen. Idiosyncratic individuals and a four-way party split were the most noticeable features of the era. Individual parties might have been disciplined, but for a couple of terms the standard adversarial structure was overlaid by the consequences of the momentous split.

In the early Nicklin years, the Parliament was not as tightly orchestrated as it would later become and parliamentary debates were more open but also vitriolic. Debates often meandered around with outspoken individuals attacking opponents at random or settling previous personal scores of little relevance to the topic under discussion. With time, however, the Country and Liberal Parties began to hold sway, sustained by comfortable majorities in the House over succeeding parliaments. As the most disciplined and unified political force, they began a new phase of Queensland's political and parliamentary history.

Historians have tended to view positively the early period of Coalition government after 1957, arguing that the Nicklin-led Coalition represented a high-water mark in cohesion, trust and amicability between the two conservative parties (Stevenson 1985; Hazlehurst 1987). With the benefit of hindsight, the Nicklin years were times of accommodation for the Coalition premised on a degree of mutual respect and a collective feeling of euphoria at finally being elected to government. Nicklin wanted to put in place the building blocks for stable Coalition government that would rival the longevity of the Labor regime. At the same time, however, relations between the Coalition parties were characterised by conflict and emerging distrust. Public conflicts were not the exclusive prerogative of the Labor side of politics. Despite signs of apparent goodwill, many of the conflicts later to tear apart the Coalition in 1983 with much rancour and bitterness were already evident behind the scenes even in its early years in government.

The new Coalition ministry of 1957

The first Nicklin ministry was commissioned by the Governor, Sir Henry Abel Smith, and gazetted in 1957 (see Lack 1962:491). Like previous Labor ministries elected by Caucus, the Coalition ministry was initially elected by votes of the respective party-room meetings, although Premier, Frank Nicklin, and the Deputy Premier, Ken Morris, distributed portfolios (Hughes 1980:158). Because of inter-party sensitivities, the allocation of ministerial portfolios was a product of joint consultation between the two leaders (plus other senior party officials). Those successful in the ballot were likely to have been selected on the basis of parliamentary seniority, intra-party configurations of support and personality considerations, rather than any nominal factional persuasion or background factors. The full first ministry was gazetted on 12 August 1957 and appeared as follows.

- Premier and Chief Secretary: Frank Nicklin, CP
- Minister for Labour and Industry: Ken Morris, Lib.
- Minister for Education: Jack Pizzey, CP
- Attorney-General: Alan Munro, Lib.
- Treasurer and Minister for Housing: Tom Hiley, Lib.
- Minister for Development, Mines and Main Roads: Ernest Evans, CP
- Minister for Public Lands and Irrigation: Alf Muller, CP
- Minister for Health and Home Affairs: Dr H. Winston Noble, Lib.
- Minister for Agriculture and Stock: Otto Madsen, CP
- Minister for Public Works and Local Government: James Heading, CP
- Minister for Transport: Gordon Chalk, Lib.

Interestingly, the Labour and Industry portfolio was initially accorded much importance by the Nicklin government, in recognition largely of the centrality of state development and the need to expand secondary industry as part of the postwar boom. The Coalition also inherited from ALP governments a belief that these responsibilities were the key to state prosperity—on which in turn rested its political survival. Indeed, in the first two terms, Labour and Industry enjoyed ministerial rank second only to the Premier's portfolio. This arrangement persisted while Ken Morris, a former 'Rat of Tobruk', remained Liberal leader and occupied the ministerial benches. After his resignation in 1962, however, the portfolio was restructured and responsibility for state development and industry development was prioritised (and given to the Premier and Deputy Premier respectively), with the rest of the portfolio demoted in importance and given to relatively junior ministers. Hence, in contrast with the later Coalition

ministries of the 1970s and 1980s, for a Country Party-led government, state development and industrial development were prime concerns, even though the particular minister responsible was generally from the Liberal partner in the Coalition.

Education became the third-ranking ministry under the competent Jack Pizzey. The new Country–Liberal government recognised the importance of education spending and policy decisions on local communities. Education was a big-spending department and politicians were conscious of the political kudos accruing from such expenditure. At the change of government, most electorates had primary schools but very few had secondary or high schools. In 1957, there were 1440 state primary schools in operation in Queensland, but only 40 public high schools (with 803 teachers and 17 000 students) for a population of 1.4 million people. Labor had relied heavily on Catholic schools to provide basic education and in policy terms had been focused on developing primary industries (mining and agriculture) that had in turn impeded the progress of public education (McQueen 1979). The new government was well aware that ministers could enhance their personal profiles by being seen to make strenuous efforts to develop education and provide additional educational services in the electorate.

Given the prominence of education, therefore, it is all the more noteworthy that in the allocation of ministries under the Coalition, the Country Party secured this prized portfolio of Education and awarded it to its second-most senior minister, Jack Pizzey, who would subsequently become the next premier. Furthermore, the Country Party retained control over this important portfolio throughout the entire Coalition period of 1957–83; indeed, only in 1996 did a Liberal minister, Bob Quinn, finally secure this portfolio, in the Borbidge Coalition government.

Education was also one of the topics raised most frequently by members in question time—especially questions asked about the numbers of teachers and when particular schools would receive facilities or repairs/extensions to buildings. So, for instance, the Member for Condamine, Les Diplock (QLP), asked the Minister for Public Works ‘when is it anticipated that work in connection with the installation of the septic system at the Dalby State School and at the Head Teacher’s residence at Dalby will be commenced?’ (*QPD* 1958:vol. 221, p. 203). He received the answer that it would begin before the end of the month. The former Premier’s son, Pat Hanlon (ALP, Ithaca), also asked a typical question of Education Minister Pizzey:

- (1) Can he indicate if any progress has been made with plans for provision of a State High School on land held at Bardon for that purpose?

(2) Is work likely to commence in the current financial year with a view to opening the School for the 1960 School year? (*QPD* 1958:vol. 221, p. 556)

Pizzey, who was always matter-of-fact, answered that all new high school sites for 1959 had already been determined and that Bardon was not one of them.

The portfolio responsibilities of the Attorney General, Alan Munro, were extended in November 1957 to include responsibility for justice. Munro was appointed separately as Minister for Justice with the new portfolio renamed Justice and Attorney-General.

Nicklin's immediate concerns

The thirty-fifth Parliament began on 27 August 1957 with 18 new members taking their seats in the 75-member Chamber—close to one-quarter of the total. Sixteen of the new members were from the conservative side—most noticeably including: Eddie Beardmore (CP, Balonne), Tom Gilmore (CP, Tablelands), Max Hodges (CP, Nash), Keith Hooper (Lib., Buranda), Bill Knox (Lib., Nundah), Bill Lonergan (CP, Flinders), Wally Rae (CP, Gregory), Sam Ramsden (Lib., Merthyr), Harold Richter (CP, Somerset), Percy Smith (Lib., Windsor), Doug Tooth (Lib., Kelvin Grove) and Bob Windsor (Lib., Fortitude Valley).¹ Two new Labor members entered the Assembly: Jack Houston (Bulimba) and Merv Thackeray (Keppel). Many of these members would become leading lights in the Parliament in years to come.

In keeping with convention, proceedings immediately turned to the election of the new Speaker. In the absence of other nominations, Alan Fletcher (CP, Cunningham), a relative newcomer, was elected unopposed. In nominating Fletcher, Pizzey acknowledged their nominee was an 'untried man' but he added:

[E]ver since he has been an hon. Member of this House he has shown himself to be a man of sound judgment, ready wit, impeccable character, and a man held in high esteem by both sides of the House—perhaps I should say by the three sides of the House as it is now constituted...He is by nature endowed with all the necessary qualifications for Speakership. He is a man of very even temper, not likely to be rattled in a crisis, a

¹ For a full list, see Lack (1962:495).

man of sound judgment, keen intellect, firm yet courteous. He is a man possessing great tact, infinite patience, and a deep understanding of human nature. (*QPD* 1957:vol. 218, p. 3)

While he might have had these qualities of a saint, Fletcher quickly showed he was also a stickler for the rules and protocols of the House. Within a few weeks of taking the chair, he reminded the House that *Standing Orders* insisted that members 'make obeisance to the Chair on entering and leaving the House', and nine days after that, he regretted 'it [was] necessary again to draw attention to this matter as some...have persistently ignored what is our usual concession to good manners, good taste and good order in the House' (*QPD* 1957:vol. 218, pp. 134, 248).

The Administrator's opening speech was presented to the Parliament on 28 August 1957. The Governor, His Excellency Lieutenant General Sir John Lavarack, who was soon to retire, was too ill to make an appearance that day. It therefore fell to the State Administrator to present the government's forthcoming agenda, saying it would 'rigorously pursue further development of the State to fully exploit and develop [its] unparalleled natural resources' (*QPD* 1957:vol. 218, p. 9). The Parliament was told the government had already declared state development a key priority. Ernie Evans (CP, Mirani) was appointed to the ministry in the newly created Development portfolio. Local government was another priority and was given its own ministerial portfolio. The House was informed that the term 'minister' had replaced the older title of 'secretary' (*AJPH* 1958:vol. 3, no. 2, p. 238). Nicklin also insisted that his cabinet ministers resign from all directorships and positions in cooperative societies and other public bodies, to avoid conflicts of interest. This rule, intended to maintain propriety, would be gradually enforced less and less strictly, eventually to lapse entirely.

A still shell-shocked Les Wood (ALP, East Toowoomba) informed the House that he was now the Labor leader and Leader of the Opposition. He announced that Eric Lloyd (Kedron) was his deputy leader, Cec Jesson (Hinchinbrook) had been appointed as the Labor whip, while Jim Donald (Bremer) was elected to the secretary's post (*QPD* 1957:vol. 218, p. 14). Wood's ascension to the leadership was short-lived. His unexpected death in March 1958 saw a new leadership team take over, with Jim Donald appointed as the new Leader of the Opposition; Lloyd remained as deputy leader while Horace Davies (Maryborough) became the party secretary and Cec Jesson continued as party whip (see *QPD* 1958:vol. 220, p. 2140). The former Premier, Vince Gair, then announced that he had been elected as leader of the QLP, with Ted Walsh (Bundaberg) as his deputy, Les Diplock (Condamine) the secretary and Harry Gardner (Rockhampton) appointed whip.

Guaranteeing supply was an urgent necessity and on the second sitting day of the new Parliament, the Treasurer, Tom Hiley, moved an urgent motion recalling how the ‘failure of Parliament to grant such Supply brought about the defeat of the Gair Government’ and ‘the *Vote on Account* granted in November last will be exhausted very early next week...[and] I am bound to tell hon. Members that the nearness to exhaustion of our existing funds makes it imperative that we should deal with this Bill today’ (*QPD* 1957:vol. 218, p. 32).

Despite the turmoil of the past year, the parliamentary session proceeded in an orderly fashion. The four main parties were seemingly determined to deal expeditiously with the matters at hand. There was little evidence of rancour between the main protagonists in the early parliamentary debates of the session (including between the QLP and the ALP). There were few major stoushes, relatively few divisions and relatively few expulsions (‘withdrawals’ in which a member was barred for the rest of the day) and no suspensions (in which members were expelled for up to 14 days).

That did not stop Labor’s Les Wood from using the Address-in-Reply debate to attempt to present the new government as unrepresentative of Queensland and not genuine in its commitment to decentralise the state. Still smarting from the days when the Labor government was dubbed a ‘Queen Street government’, he argued that the new Country–Liberal government seemed to have even fewer representatives from regional Queensland in its cabinet:

Mr Wood: Except for the member for Mirani, the Minister for Development, Mines and Main Roads, not one Cabinet Minister, figuratively speaking, is more than a stone’s throw from the metropolis of Brisbane.

Mr Dewar: What has that got to do with it?

Mr Wood: It has a great deal to do with the State. After all, the hon. member for Chermside [Dewar] has joined with others opposite in vaunting their claim to being an all-Queensland and decentralised Government. Their first act upon taking office was to elect a Cabinet that cannot in any sense of the word be termed a Queensland Cabinet. Four Ministers represent Brisbane electorates, five live within two hours of Brisbane by car and one lives not much more than three hours away...During the war the Tory Government in Canberra were rightly charged with throwing North Queensland to the wolves in setting up the Brisbane line of defence. This same system has been adopted by this new Queensland Cabinet—they have set up a Brisbane-line Cabinet.

Mr Dewar: What rot! (*QPD* 1957:vol. 218, p. 42)

Rot it might have been, but before the government had managed to initiate anything for which it could be held to account, old-fashioned mud-slinging was about all the opposition could muster in the short term.

Questions in the House followed strict guidelines, with questions on notice given to the Speaker the day before they could be asked (questions without notice were not permitted until the 1970s, and even then were relatively rare). House rules did not prevent Fred Graham (ALP, Mackay) attempting to ask the Premier about a particular franchise agreement involving the Caltex Oil Company in Mackay. Graham asked Nicklin if he would table the agreement recently signed between the government and the company. His question was given short shrift by the Premier, who replied with a monosyllabic ‘no’ (*QPD* 1957:vol. 218, p. 134). Undeterred, the next day, Graham again tried to ask the same question without notice, but this time was put in his place by the ‘Gentleman Premier’, who told the Labor backbencher that

[w]hen questions are asked in this House without notice it is the usual courtesy to give the Minister concerned a copy of the questions beforehand. When the hon. member has sufficient courtesy to give me copies of questions he is going to ask me without notice, possibly I will give some consideration to them. (*QPD* 1957:vol. 218, p. 159).

The Premier did not seem to perceive the irony in demanding to see ahead of time questions that pertained to be without notice.

The Address-in-Reply debate in 1958 was unexpectedly quiet, with little animosity on display between the ALP and the QLP. Heated debate did arise, however, over the issue of resourcing the opposition. Johnno Mann, the previous Speaker, asked a question aimed at embarrassing the QLP’s Vince Gair:

Mr Mann (Brisbane) asked the Premier—

In view of the fact that the Gair Cabinet refused secretarial assistance in June last to the then Leader of the Australian Labor Party in Parliament, and that in conveying this decision to Mr Duggan, the ex-Premier Mr Gair said—

to grant such assistance to the leader of a third party would be to establish a new and important practice; and

that this matter should be reserved for determination by the incoming Government—

1. Does he consider that in providing a secretary and a typist for Mr Gair, a new and important practice has been established?

2. What were the grounds for departing from precedent?
3. Since the Liberal Party of eight members in the last Parliament received no such assistance, does the new practice imply that eleven members constitute a party and that eight do not?

He was told by the Premier:

My Government has no intention of perpetuating practices which it considers to be wrong. We have always held the view that the Leader of any major political party should be provided with the necessary secretarial and typing assistance to enable him to effectively carry out his Parliament duties. (*QPD* 1957:vol. 218, p. 172)

The government faced one want-of-confidence motion, in March 1958. Initially, the Leader of the Opposition, Les Wood, wrote to the Speaker informing him of his intention to move a motion for adjournment over 'the present grave unemployment situation' and the 'failure of the Government to provide any substantial correctives' (*QPD* 1958:vol. 220, p. 1640). A rich line-up of members spoke in the adjournment debate (used in those days as a censure motion), including Les Wood, Eric Lloyd, Vince Gair, Bill Power, Jim Donald, Pat Hanlon and Tom Aikens speaking against the government, while Frank Nicklin, Tom Hiley, Ernest Evans, Ken Morris and Gordon Chalk defended the government. Nicklin's reply was measured in comparison with Labor's attacks. He replied:

I have listened with a great deal of interest to the Leader of the Opposition and his Deputy in the hope that I might get some constructive suggestions to deal with the problem on which the motion is based, but I am grievously disappointed... Instead we have heard a tirade against the Government and many wild statements that cannot be substantiated... the Leader of the Opposition and his Deputy have done the State a grave disservice. (*QPD* 1958:vol. 220, p. 1652)

The same day, Vince Gair gave notice of a want-of-confidence motion that was formally moved two days later, on 6 March 1958. Gair's motion led to a marathon debate lasting more than 13 hours and finishing at 12.54 am the next day. In moving the want-of-confidence motion in the government, Gair cited unemployment as one of the issues of concern along with the cost of basic commodities, rent control problems and a growing disquiet over recent appointments in the Queensland Police Force (*QPD* 1958:vol. 220, p. 1701). Nicklin put on a brave face, saying 'it is very evident that there has been a battle of tactics between the two component Opposition parties in an endeavour to gain some political advantage' (*QPD* 1958:vol. 220, p. 1748). When the final vote

was taken, the ALP members vacated the Chamber and the vote was lost with seven 'ayes' to 36 'noes'. The want-of-confidence motion in effect highlighted the deep divisions between the QLP and the ALP (see Lack 1962:499).

The government's announcement that it had appointed Frank Bischof as the new Queensland Police Commissioner also left the opposition smarting. Bischof was a known Freemason and his appointment was viewed by the QLP as being suspect and smacking of political patronage. Some believed that Bischof's promotion was proof of 'a Masonic cabal over the "Green Mafia" [police of Irish-Catholic descent] who had dominated the force under Labor' (Johnston 1992:186).

The Treasurer, Tom Hiley (*QPD* 1957:vol. 218, p. 345), had flagged in his first budget speech that he was unhappy with the format of the budget, expressing doubts about whether 'the form of presentation' was 'sufficiently clear'. Because of 'the brevity of the Government's period in office', however, his first budget was presented in the standard way of former Treasurers. By the next year, however, a new format was announced in which the consolidated revenue fund now included the full anticipated revenue of the year as well as the full anticipated expenditure. Hiley anticipated such changes would make the true budget position of the state clearer.

The government was also keen to restore the recognition and awarding of imperial honours. Successive Labor governments for decades had not recommended such honours. Nicklin reinstated the practice of recommending knighthoods to deserving Queenslanders. By July 1958, three knighthoods had been confirmed, including the Chief Justice, His Honour Mr Justice Mansfield (Lack 1962:514). Gradually, over time, many of the senior members of the Nicklin cabinet would be awarded knighthoods.

By the third session of the Parliament, the parties had settled into a routine of sorts. There were occasional indications that relations between the QLP and the ALP were calming, especially in relation to the performance of the government. In his Address-in-Reply debate, Jack Duggan, who had returned to the Assembly after winning the seat of North Toowoomba in May 1958 (see Chapter 6), made the point that since the government's election two years earlier, 'the rich have got richer [while] the poor are getting less' (*QPD* 1959:vol. 224, p. 30). Vince Gair seemed to concur, attacking the government over similar issues and arguing that over the life of this government, 'we have witnessed an appalling decline in the living standards of wage-earners' (*QPD* 1959:vol. 224, p. 215). Ted Walsh further fanned the flames of reconciliation when he stated:

There are conditions on which any member of the ALP will consider going back to the ALP or the Labour Movement. The government no doubt will continue to gloat over the disunity in the Labour Movement

since individual interests have been allowed to supersede the interests of the masses. I do not care whether it is myself or anyone else, but in the role of a proper reconciliation of the Labour Movement individuals, no matter who they may be or where they may come from, should not be allowed to stand in the way of any such reconciliation. (*QPD* 1959:vol. 224, p. 188)

They were soon quashed, however, when an exchange between Duggan and Gair highlighted the tensions that still existed. To Gair's assertion that there was a communist influence within the ALP that could not be trusted, Duggan replied that any pleas for unity by QLP members should be regarded as deeply suspect (see *AJPH* 1960:vol. 6, no. 1, p. 95). The two groups were in no way united and the government went into the election year virtually unchallenged.²

Nicklin's re-election in 1960: patching compromise over emerging tensions

By 1960 the fledgling Coalition government was now conscious that, in its second term, it would increasingly have to take a stand on controversial policy issues and be less able to rely on a honeymoon period of goodwill or point to the failures of previous Labor administrations. At its first re-election, the Nicklin–Morris government was intent on consolidation and making its tenure in office more secure. Press reports spoke of Nicklin's preference for 'urging restraint and caution' to the party faithful and his preparedness to operate as a 'mediator in inter-party differences and a brake on more headstrong members' (*Courier-Mail*, 28 March 1960, p. 2). Finally in office, some zealous branch members in the Country Party were anxious to bind the government to party policy, but the Coalition ministry (like the Gair ministry before it) was determined not to be bound by 'outside interests' even if these were its own cadre.

Premier Nicklin indicated definitively to his own party and rural supporters that his government would not be a puppet to 'outside interests' even from within the Country Party itself. This set the early pattern of government. Journalists were already acknowledging that, after only a few years in office, Nicklin very much ran his own show. One reporter, John Higgins, commenting on the government's first four years, reported that

resolutions passed at annual party conventions have been blandly ignored by Cabinet; policy pledges and election promises have been repudiated; and the Central Council of the Country party has actually

² For further details of political events between 1957 and 1960, see Lack (1962), who also covers these years.

had the humiliation of being told bluntly by a Country party Cabinet Minister that he regards them as a ‘pressure group’ and will not accept dictation [of policy promises] from them! (Higgins 1961:15)

The 1960 state election was held on 28 May. A total of 228 candidates nominated for the new House of 78 seats—with 74 standing for the ALP, a combined 73 for the Coalition (34 Country Party and 39 Liberal) and 57 for the QLP, six communists and 18 independents (two seats were retained by the Country Party as uncontested seats—namely, Cunningham, held by Alan Fletcher, and Isis, held by Jack Pizzey). In the 1950s and early 1960s, it was not uncommon for some very safe seats to be left uncontested by other parties or by local independents; the sitting member then took the seat uncontested. The main political issues of the campaign were debates over the government’s record and achievements, contrasted with the perceived ‘knocking’ of the opposition and other critics. The internal wrangles within the Labor camp remained a persistent issue, especially the alleged communist influence over the ALP set against the credibility or standing of the QLP with its strident rhetoric and sectarian appeal. Gair appealed to voters to reject communists in government, saying ‘if they are there—throw them out; if they are trying to get there—keep them out’ (*Courier-Mail*, 10 May 1960). Economic issues provided the main policy themes, with debates centring on the recession and unemployment, plans for prosperity and job creation, the need for new industries, problems with inflation and the removal of price and rent controls, a proposal for a state bank, whether to legislate for industrial conditions (for example, annual leave provisions) and the regulation of trade union elections. Unemployment remained the principal concern of the day, with jobless registrations running at about 15 500 a month in 1960. There was much criticism of the federal government’s economic policies and fear of a looming recession. The magnitude of the problem was exacerbated by the nature of Queensland’s industries, which were narrowly based and displayed a strong reliance on seasonal employment. The cost of living was increasing as the controls on prices and rents were removed. Social issues were generally restricted to the support for housing and free public hospitals.

Day-to-day campaigning was conducted around public meetings with set speeches, dour rhetoric and a great many precise statistics conveying growth, state development and employment levels. State politicians still invested considerable credibility in the incontrovertibility of facts and figures, reciting them at length to a largely poorly educated electorate. In the print media, each party received lengthy press coverage, which detailed their policies, campaign movements and audience responses. Journalists delighted in recounting selected quotations from witty hecklers—for instance, when the Liberal leader, Ken Morris, told a gathering ‘[n]ow I come to a matter which we consider of vital importance to Queensland’s development’, one witty interjector

exclaimed: 'He's going to resign!' (*Courier-Mail*, 12 May 1960). To promote their message, political leaders were obliged to tour the state, usually without a large accompanying entourage. Compared with later years, the travelling political circus of the 1960s was still in its infancy. Even the Premier, who journeyed by rail coach, motorcar and occasionally by air, travelled with only his secretary, one other staff member and two accompanying journalists. He was reported as 'easygoing' on tour, making toast for staff and washing up 'out the back' of his railway coach (*Courier-Mail*, 26 May 1960). The ALP Opposition Leader, Jack Duggan, also crisscrossed the state, making conventional whistle-stop speeches criticising the Coalition government for 'repudiating' 14 of its 1957 pledges and defending Labor against the QLP. Significantly, the 1960 election was the first state campaign to use television and political leaders from all parties availed themselves of the new opportunity to reach voters. Both major parties received an allocated 45 minutes on the ABC, with the QLP given 25 minutes. Perhaps somewhat presciently, the press described the introduction of television as turning the campaign into a 'gala' event more like a 'Hollywood circus' with variety concerts, band recitals and 'personality' appearances (*Sunday Mail*, 17 April 1960). The razzamatuzz certainly attracted the media's attention but it is not clear whether it attracted the voters.

Launching its 1960 campaign, the Nicklin–Morris government asked voters to renew its mandate and give it the chance to carry out its program. The Coalition parties produced a joint policy platform but took separate responsibility for launching key sections of the package. Each party leader attended the other's policy launch—a public gesture designed to emphasise harmonious collaboration. The Premier, anxious to deliver his policy launch in his electorate of Landsborough, addressed 400 people at Maroochydore compared with the 1000 who attended Ken Morris's speech for the Liberals in Brisbane. Without making rash promises, the government stressed its prudent record in providing expanded services in education and health and in attracting increased investment in factories and construction. Nicklin promised to maintain and improve the state's free hospital system, increase road construction and economic infrastructure (including a new power station at Callide), reduce rail freight charges and provide a modern plane for the flying surgeon. The Premier was also keen to establish an independent tribunal to set parliamentary salaries as these had become contentious during the previous Parliament.

The Liberals, defending the government's economic record, promised more homes, better job opportunities, better education and health standards and improved roads. Unlike the Country Party, the Liberals maintained an attack on the ALP, which at times became personal, with Morris labelling the Labor leader a 'puppet of the Trades Hall masters' (*Courier-Mail*, 12 May 1960).

The Liberals also clarified their position in relation to the ‘new state’ movement active in the north by offering to hold a referendum on the formation of a new state in north Queensland. Although under the *Australian Constitution* the power to grant statehood was not vested in individual states, a number of petitions (13 in total) had been circulating in the north and had reputedly attracted more than 30 000 signatures. The Liberals took this stance in part because the Coalition was facing ‘new state’ candidates in some northern electorates and, with little support to lose in the region, they felt that they could capitalise on the northern mood. In any event, were a new state to be formed, it would affect the Liberal’s support base the least; a northern state would predominantly remove Country and Labor Party territory, thereby proportionally strengthening the Liberal heartland in the south-east. After the election, Premier Nicklin was cautious not to excite enthusiasm for the ‘new state’ movement. He announced in the House that while it was still the ‘policy of the Government to foster the establishment of new States’ there were ‘many constitutional and financial problems to be overcome’ (*QPD* 1961:vol. 229, p. 2373).

The ALP and the QLP attacked the government over what they perceived as broken promises, focusing on the poor state of the economy. Both criticised the government’s policy of removing price controls and presiding over huge price and rent increases. Much of the opposition’s momentum though was compromised by the hostility and mutual suspicion between the two Labor Parties. Hence, neither conservative party was particularly worried by either of the rival oppositional parties of Labor. After one term in Coalition government, the Liberals were describing Labor as the ‘weakest Opposition in Queensland’s Parliamentary history’ and having a ‘constant obsession with trivialities and personal bickerings’ (*What We Have Done...and What We Will Do*, Liberal Party pamphlet, 1960). Indeed, the Country Party virtually ignored the Labor Party’s campaign, refusing to lend credibility to the ALP or descend to engage in debate on Labor’s chosen terrain. The fact that the ALP and QLP were also campaigning against each other allowed the conservative government to capitalise on the advantages of incumbency, to appear statesmanlike and unsullied by infighting.

Despite passionate speeches from the various party leaders, the 1960 state election was ‘very quiet’, according to seasoned observers of the day (Grimshaw 1960b), and ‘one of the quietest in the history of Queensland politics’ (Lack 1962:572). More importantly, perhaps, although the contest was ostensibly between the Coalition and the various Labor Parties contesting for the right to form government, the main battle lines were drawn *within* the two competing camps: the Country Party ensuring it prevailed over the Liberals, and the official ALP over the rump QLP. If by contemporary standards the election campaign appeared lacklustre and mundane, deeper conflicts were flowing below the surface. Certainly the contemporary policy issues were pedestrian

and predictable, but the main political interest in the election was over the twin battles for supremacy on separate sides of the House. There did not appear to be much prospect of the ALP defeating the Coalition outright.

Within the Coalition, the Country Party was determined to remain the dominant political force and control key positions in the new Parliament. During the first Coalition government, the Liberals had made overtures about closer cooperation and had proposed arrangements for a full merger with the Country Party. The Liberals' 1959 state conference advocated a special conference of members of both parties to explore the vexed question of 'complete union'. The issue of relative representation in parliament, however, remained a divisive factor and the Country Party made it clear that a complete union with the Liberals was not high on its agenda. Moreover, the Country Party, at its state conference in Bundaberg, had rejected a proposal to replace the state's 'simple majority' voting system (first past the post) with a compulsory preferential system. The main reason for the rejection of preferential voting (which was soon to be introduced in 1962; see Chapter 5) was that the Country Party still felt in the late 1950s that it could maximise its advantage relative to the Liberals and the various fragmented Labor Parties. The Country Party believed that a 'winner-takes-all' system was far more advantageous to it, whereas a preferential system would benefit the Liberals, which could threaten the Country Party's dominance as the senior partner in the Coalition. As the Opposition Leader, Jack Duggan, was able to point out, Frank Nicklin had admitted that the Country Party was reluctant to reintroduce preferential voting because of pressure from rank-and-file members of the party (*Courier-Mail*, 5 May 1960).

Party representation in the Parliament, 1960–63

The eventual result of the 1960 election was never much in doubt; newspaper reports had largely predicted the Coalition's win well before the day of the poll. Given that the government comfortably held between 35 and 40 seats out of the old 75-seat Chamber, the local press had confidently predicted a conservative victory. The *Sunday Mail* announced as early as 28 February 1960 that the Country–Liberal government was 'virtually assured of a new three year term in office'. Political writer David Berry provided five reasons supporting his claim: the government had consolidated its position since the 1957 election; it had dodged controversial issues such as SP betting, liquor licensing and the bill of rights; there was no strong electoral challenge from the opposition (Labor was internally divided and the AWU had left the ALP—although the AWU still donated £1500 to the campaign); the ALP had slender financial resources with which to fight a television campaign (reportedly £8000 compared with the

£15–20 000 needed); and, most importantly perhaps to the final outcome, the electoral redistribution of 1959 in effect ‘entrenched the government’ (*Sunday Mail*, 28 February 1960).

Other press reports, nevertheless, still referred to bitter clashes over particular seats—especially Brisbane seats—as local identities fought for political survival. Some of these battles were fought between party representatives from the same political side, as in South Brisbane, where the former Premier, Vince Gair (who had held the seat since 1932), was challenged and beaten by ALP alderman and barrister Col Bennett; or in Lockyer, where the sitting Liberal, Gordon Chalk (who had occupied the seat since 1950—and before that East Toowoomba from 1947–50—and was a future Liberal leader), was challenged in a personal duel by an independent Country Party candidate and farmer, J. P. Martin, who had backing from local road hauliers. Implying an attack on Chalk, Martin tried to run a campaign with no strings attached, asserting that ‘all the money I take will have to be absolutely clean. I won’t take money from breweries and I won’t take money from communists’ (*Sunday Mail*, 3 April 1960). At the election, Martin was soundly beaten by Chalk by a margin of 2758 votes (5077 to Chalk and 2319 votes to Martin). These intense conflicts highlighted one of the more enduring characteristics of party politics in Queensland—that some of the main electoral battles and most bitter fights have occurred between party rivals ostensibly on the same side of politics. For the most part, the party leaders (Nicklin, Morris, Chalk and Duggan) tried to remain above the fray and observe a formalised ‘gentlemanly’ courtesy towards each other; indeed, there was some mutual affection between Nicklin and Duggan, and later between Duggan and Chalk. The same was not true for Gair, who fought tooth and nail. Party leaders were also active in attempting to minimise intra-party challenges—although their mixed success in this respect illustrated the relatively weak position of the leadership compared with the party branches and membership.

The final distribution of seats in the 78-seat Legislative Assembly was shaped by the 1959 electoral redistribution, which subdivided the state into three electoral zones (metropolitan with 28 electorates, provincial with 12 and the country with 38 electorates) (*AJPH* 1959:vol. 5, no. 1, p. 101). This provided a substantial electoral advantage to the Coalition government, especially the Country Party, and the eventual composition of the 1960 Parliament reflected this apportionment. The ratio of the largest electoral enrolment to the lowest was two-to-one, but in terms of numerical equality across the electorates the 1960 distribution was statistically the most ‘equal’ since 1944, with a relatively low Gini index of equality (Stevenson 1985:4/19–20). The weighting accorded to the various zones, however, combined with a careful drawing of electoral boundaries, provided significant advantage to the Country Party, enabling it to remain in government as the larger of the conservative parties.

At the 1960 poll, both the government and the ALP opposition increased the number of seats they held, by four and five respectively. The Coalition parties each gained two seats, increasing their combined representation from 42 to 46—and increasing the government's majority from nine to 14 seats. The combined vote for the Coalition was 43.53 per cent from 72 candidates. The Country Party, however, with only 19.5 per cent of the vote, remained the dominant Coalition party in the Parliament with 26 seats, compared with the Liberals with 20 seats secured from 24.03 per cent of the vote. The ALP, with 39.89 per cent of the state-wide vote (an increase of 11 per cent from 1957), secured 25 seats in the new Parliament—up from 20 (although one had been reclaimed at a by-election earlier). The assurances given by the government at the time of the electoral redistribution that the election result would deliver a 'close correspondence' between the seats won and the vote cast was shown to be entirely false (Grimshaw 1960a).

The major loser at the election was the QLP. Its vote collapsed to half the figure it achieved at the previous election, falling from 23.39 per cent in 1957 to 12.27 per cent in 1960. It lost seven seats as its parliamentary representation declined from 11 to four. The main casualty was the party leader, Vince Gair. Despite his pugnacious oratory and aggressive campaign, the former Premier was defeated in South Brisbane by the ALP candidate, Col Bennett. With only four seats and no parliamentary leader, the QLP was in a parlous situation. Paul Hilton, a former Minister of Works, Housing and Local Government under the Gair government, was elected as party leader, but during the parliamentary term he suffered problems with his health and lost his seat at the next election. In addition, two of the four remaining rump QLP members—Ted Walsh (Bundaberg) and Herbert 'Bunny' Adair (Cook)—deserted the party over the issue of formally affiliating with the southern Democratic Labor Party, declaring themselves as independents before the 1963 election.

Three successful independents complemented the new Parliament: Arthur Coburn (Burdekin), James Houghton (Redcliffe) and Tom Aikens (Townsville South). Arthur Coburn survived as the independent Member for Burdekin until retiring in 1969. 'Big Jim' Houghton eventually joined the Country Party and went on to become an effective and respected Speaker of the House (serving from October 1974 to July 1979), but became notorious for other reasons immediately after his election in 1960 (see below). Tom Aikens had long been a remarkable figure in the Parliament, first as a representative of his own North Queensland Labor Party (NQLP), then from 1960 as the North Queensland Party (having dropped Labor from his party title). Aikens served continuously as an MLA from 1944 to 1977. He gave vim to both sides on any subject that came to mind. He hated professionals (especially judges) and would frequently make personal attacks on other individuals. In the Parliament, he had almost legendary gall,

was quick on his feet and had a good memory and a thick hide. Less certain with figures, Aikens was an accomplished orator who could make meandering speeches that were both powerfully cutting and humorous in their delivery. At times, though, he could also become foul-mouthed, predictably repetitious, go on and on unremittingly and be more of a nuisance than an addition to the deliberative process. Aikens, along with the QLP's Ted Walsh, was a persistent and incorrigible interjector.

The final results in terms of parliamentary representation attracted contention. The Opposition Leader, Jack Duggan, used the next Address-in-Reply debate to criticise the electoral malapportionment under which he pointed out that Labor's state-wide vote of about 40 per cent translated into only 25 seats, whereas the Country Party gained 26 seats with a mere 19.49 per cent and the Liberals 20 seats with 24.03 per cent (*QPD* 1960:vol. 227, pp. 100–1). He failed to mention that if the 'Labor' votes of the two feuding parties (the ALP and QLP) were combined, they secured 52.17 per cent of the popular vote state-wide for just 29 seats in the 78-seat Assembly. Essentially, in addition to the zonal malapportionment, the first-past-the-post voting system used in 1960 had penalised divided parties and magnified representational margins.

Balancing interests in the second Coalition ministry—and the 'mangy dog' kerfuffle

The government in its second term retained most members of the first Nicklin ministry. The re-elected Coalition retained its 11 portfolios, which were again split six to the Country Party and five to the Liberals. In 1960, this six–five allocation roughly approximated the relative strengths of the Coalition parties in the Parliament, but significantly under-represented the Liberals in terms of the proportion of the primary vote they recorded. Only two ministerial changes occurred to the frontbench immediately after the election (gazetted on 9 June 1960). The Member for Whitsunday, Lloyd Roberts (CP), was elected to the ministry to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Jim Heading (CP, Marodian) in the portfolio of Public Works and Local Government. Heading, whose seat of Marodian was abolished in the 1959 redistribution, retired from political office at the 1960 election and was knighted shortly after—prompting some in the opposition to suggest that when the government wanted to dispose of ministers or other senior parliamentarians they softened the blow by awarding knighthoods (see the speech by ALP Member for Rockhampton North, Merv Thackeray, in *QPD* 1961:vol. 230, pp. 866–7). A week later, Alan Fletcher (CP, Darling Downs) was elected to the position of Minister for Public Lands and Irrigation, after Alf (Adolf Gustav) Muller (a former deputy leader

of the Country Party and Member for Fassifern) felt compelled to resign his portfolio (see below). The Minister for Agriculture and Forestry, Otto Madsen, served as the Minister for Public Lands and Irrigation for one week (9–16 June) pending the election of a replacement for Muller from the Country Party.

The six Country Party ministers and five Liberal ministers in the new cabinet eventually then consisted of

- Premier and Chief Secretary: Frank Nicklin, CP
- Minister for Labour and Industry: Ken Morris, Lib.
- Minister for Education and Migration: Jack Pizzey, CP
- Minister for Justice and Attorney-General: Alan Munro, Lib.
- Treasurer and Minister for Housing: Tom Hiley, Lib.
- Minister for Development, Mines, Main Roads and Electricity: Ernest Evans, CP
- Minister for Agriculture and Forestry: Otto Madsen, CP
- Minister for Health and Home Affairs: Dr Winston Noble, Lib.
- Minister for Transport: Gordon Chalk, Lib.
- Minister for Public Works and Local Government: Lloyd Roberts, CP
- Minister for Public Lands and Irrigation: Alan Fletcher, CP

A number of the Coalition ministers were known for their distinctive personal characteristics or homespun philosophies. ‘Postage stamp’ portraits were sometimes recorded in the press: the Premier, Frank Nicklin, was ‘popular’, a ‘gentleman premier’ and showed the ‘qualities of good average Australianism’; his hard-working deputy, Ken Morris, had a ‘missionary zeal’ and was ‘impatient, restless [and had] a driving force that has thrown him into conflict with some other government members’. The Attorney-General, Alan Munro, was ‘reserved’. The Education Minister, Jack Pizzey, shied away from controversy, while the Transport Minister, Gordon Chalk, who was ‘hard-working but recently harassed’, clearly did not shy away from controversy. The Health Minister, Dr Winston Noble, was considered ‘suave’, while the ‘24 stone’ Otto Madsen was a knowledgeable Agriculture Minister and appeared ‘jovial’ and ‘benevolent’. The Treasurer, Tom Hiley, affected a ‘worldly’ image in contrast with the Development Minister, Ernie Evans, who was tough, blunt and was known to ‘call a spade a spade’ (*Courier-Mail*, 28 March 1960). Hiley would later be remembered for his exacting dress sense; one Labor frontbencher said of Hiley: ‘he earned the reputation as the vainest member in the House. Some hon. members will recall that he was always dressed in a three-piece suit, wore a carnation in his buttonhole and walked with a cane. He looked a picture of sartorial splendour’ (*QPD* 1982:vol. 288, p. 1047).

Other assessments were less homely and complacent. Some critics referred to the Country–Liberal government as a ‘government by cabinet’ (Higgins 1961:15). The Nicklin ministry was accused of centralising power around a few dominant personalities in cabinet (Hiley, Pizzey and Evans) who were less inclined to implement party demands or remain consistent with official party policy. Other writers have described the close friendship between Nicklin and Morris and cited this as a major reason why the Nicklin premiership represented a ‘golden age’ of Coalition harmony (Stevenson 1985:5/1 ff.). Some have argued in retrospect that Nicklin was neither a dominant nor a charismatic leader, but someone who earned the respect of his colleagues and party supporters because of his honesty, diligence and capacity to allow others to take credit for their own achievements (Hazlehurst 1987).

On the face of it, the Nicklin ministry was relatively cohesive and harmonious. Senior members of the cabinet often made reference to the durability of the Coalition in government. For instance, shortly after the 1960 election, the deputy leader, Ken Morris, reminded the Parliament that as the leader of the Liberal Party he was ‘a partner—a happy partner—in the coalition Government’ (*QPD* 1960:vol. 227, p. 22). Whether the Liberals were indeed ‘happy’ with their junior status was another matter, although public expressions of discord with the Coalition arrangements were not common among the leadership echelon of either party.

Behind the scenes, however, the Coalition ministry was far from united. In July 1962, the government announced that Premier Nicklin, who was then sixty-six years of age, would soon retire—possibly after the 1963 election (*AJPH* 1963:vol. 9, no. 1, p. 100). Nicklin, after all, had led the Country Party for 22 years since June 1941, leading it for 16 years in opposition and by then another six years in government. His deputy, Ken Morris, was energetic but due to ill health (and the illness of his wife) began a gradual withdrawal from office throughout 1962. The circumstances of Morris’s departure from state politics were the subject of much dispute at the time.

Morris had come under intense leadership pressure in September 1961, principally from Dr Winston Noble, who campaigned ostensibly for a younger leader (Morris was then fifty-seven years of age), even though Noble’s main complaint was that Morris was risking the Coalition by causing a public ‘showdown’ with the Country Party. The catalyst for the showdown occurred over the ‘independent’ member Jim Houghton. Now in the Parliament, Houghton had been a popular local mayor who had thrown his hat in the preselection ring for Redcliffe on Brisbane’s outskirts, running as a Country Party candidate. When he was unsuccessful in securing the party’s endorsement, he ran in the general election as a conservative independent and won the seat regardless. As

a sitting member, he first began as an independent, then joined the Liberals in May 1961, causing inter-party friction within the Coalition. The Country Party refused to recognise him as a member of the Coalition with rights to attend joint-party meetings—in effect, they were ‘dictating’ to the Liberals who could and could not be counted as a Coalition member. The reason why the Country Party opposed Houghton joining the Liberals was simple: they regarded his electorate of Redcliffe as Country Party not Liberal territory. Moreover, if Houghton was allowed to join the Liberals this would have reduced the Country Party’s majority over the Liberals in the Parliament to only four, or in absolute numbers 25 to 21—too close for comfort.

Hence, the Houghton incident escalated into a major dispute between the Coalition partners, posing dilemmas especially for the Liberal parliamentary party and its state executive. Ken Morris was intent on supporting Houghton and making a stand against the Country Party’s edict, so persuaded the Liberal state executive to refuse to bend to the Country Party’s demands. The Liberal executive declared that its Coalition partner was an ‘outside body’ and that the Liberals would not ‘accept that any outside body has the right to dictate who shall or shall not be removed from any unit of the party’ (*Courier-Mail*, 16 September 1961). Other senior Liberals, however, took an alternative view, preferring to side with the Country Party rather than endanger the Coalition in government. Dr Winston Noble, Tom Hiley and Gordon Chalk were all reported to have told Morris that they would not support a move to have Houghton attend joint-party meetings as a Liberal against the wishes of the Country Party. So, the Liberals broke ranks over the issue and Morris withdrew rather than put his leadership immediately on the line. As far as Houghton was concerned, the Liberals had refused to stand by him and he responded by resigning from the Liberal Party in September 1961. At the time, the Liberal State President was reported to have claimed that Houghton’s resignation from the Liberal Party was ‘engineered under duress’ (*QPD* 1961:vol. 230, p. 380). Subsequently, in July 1962, Houghton rejoined the Country Party and was re-elected in 1963, claiming on the way that he was not personally concerned which party he aligned himself with but was ‘tired of being treated like a mangy dog’ (*Courier-Mail*, 13 July 1962). The Houghton saga, although unique, indicates a degree of fluidity and opportunism extant among the political parties of Queensland at the time. It also indicates the fragility of the Coalition relationship and the tendency of ‘collaborators’ among the senior parliamentary Liberals to side with the Country Party for the sake of the survival of the government (and perhaps their own political careers). Yet even if the parliamentary leadership could resolve some issues, this did not prevent a ‘continual bickering’ between the two parties ‘injuring the government’s reputation’ (*Truth*, 20 September 1964).

As a result of a culmination of factors, Morris resigned as the leader of the Liberal Party in August 1962 and then resigned as Deputy Premier in September—a position that was largely nominal in the Coalition. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Deputy Premier was largely a titular position. The person enjoyed influence and prestige but the position did not carry any portfolio responsibilities, not being linked to a specific portfolio (as it generally was after 1974—usually the Treasurer’s job). As Nicklin’s deputy, Morris had performed an important political role and enjoyed a status as the leader of the minor party in the Coalition, although he would not normally be expected to assume the premiership should it fall vacant. Morris (who had separate responsibilities as the Labour and Industry Minister) articulated and personified the Liberal aspiration of becoming the dominant Coalition partner. Initially, the Liberal influence within the Coalition was strong under Morris’s leadership but this began to wane in the early 1960s. Morris resigned his portfolio responsibilities in October 1962 but continued in cabinet until December 1962, thereby virtually completing two full parliamentary terms in government. In his last term, his leadership was dogged by political infighting, as well as by a personal scandal over land development. He became involved in the ‘land scandal’ when it was claimed he improperly used the police wireless to help secure freehold land for himself at Mossman. Morris argued in his defence that he had done nothing illegal and that the opposition merely implied it was improper for a cabinet minister to buy land and bring ‘development to an isolated area’. He also confirmed that he frequently used ‘the Police Wireless channel for exchanging messages, because it is both cheaper and quicker’ than regular Post Master General services (*QPD* 1960:vol. 228, pp. 1241–2).

Alex Dewar (Lib., Wavell) was appointed as Minister for Labour and Industry in January 1963 after Morris’s resignation from cabinet. Although illness prevented Morris from contesting the 1963 state election, he had in the meantime become an executive of a private firm relating to his previous portfolio (Industrial Estates Queensland Proprietary Limited). Colleagues claimed that Morris had left the Parliament in a ‘state of physical and nervous exhaustion’ but then ‘made a splendid recovery...from a severe peptic ulcer’ (*Courier-Mail*, 1 November 1963). The ‘miraculous’ Morris then stood for election as a Liberal senator for Queensland (presumably involving him in less-onerous duties) and completed five years in Canberra (1963–68) (Hughes 1980:115). He was eventually disendorsed by the Liberal state executive and replaced by Bill Heatley. Such infighting provided a feast for the Labor opposition who were always sceptical about the formal reasons given for Morris’s early departure from the Parliament. Jack Duggan was wont to hark back to the Deputy Premier’s retirement at any available opportunity. In debating the estimates for the Department of Labour and Industry in October 1963 (when Dewar was minister shortly after Morris’s departure), Duggan indicated Labor’s assessment of the events. He stated that

not long ago we shared in the regret at the previous Minister's being unable to continue in office. We were told that he was suffering from ill-health, and it was necessary for him to relinquish his political responsibilities. He retired from Parliament. All I want to say now is that I would very much like the names of the doctors who have so miraculously restored him to health in about two or three months that he now feels fit enough to gird his loins and enter the political fray as a Senate candidate. This seems to suggest three things, namely (a) his health was not as bad as it was said to be; (b) he has made a remarkable recovery; or (c) because he was unacceptable to the majority of his party members he was pushed out, and he has used his campaigning skills to get the executive of the Liberal Party behind him in securing his endorsement. (*QPD* 1963:vol. 236, p. 1046)

Liberal parliamentarians still persisted in the view that Morris had retired because of ill health; Doug Tooth (Lib., Ashgrove) reiterated in response to Duggan that Morris had carried a heavy responsibility and was never home after 7.30am or home before 7.30pm. Tooth assured the Parliament that Morris suffered 'physical and nervous exhaustion' and also developed 'severe peptic ulceration' (*QPD* 1963:vol. 236, p. 1115).

The Liberal parliamentarians elected the Attorney-General, Alan Munro, to replace Morris as party leader in August 1962. As the new Liberal leader, Munro was then appointed to the position of Deputy Premier from September 1962. The Liberal Party then elected Treasurer, Tom Hiley, as deputy party leader. Hiley had already served as a leader of the party from 1948 to 1954, and was eventually to succeed Munro in 1965 but only for a short period.

Death and illness were also to strike other ministers in Nicklin's first two ministries. Following the death of Lloyd Roberts in April 1961, Harold Richter (CP) became Minister for Public Works and Local Government (4 May 1961). John Row (CP) became Minister for Agriculture and Forestry in June 1963, after the fifty-eight-year-old Otto Madsen underwent an operation and then resigned from the ministry and the Parliament shortly before his death. The appointment of Row, a northern canefarmer, to the ministry was significant because he was selected directly by the Premier rather than by party ballot (as provided by the amended party rules after the 1961 state conference). More ominously in light of subsequent events, Jack Pizzey, the man most likely to replace Nicklin as premier, was also in poor health and suffered a heart attack in 1962.

Nicklin's cabinet was notable because it operated according to prescribed understandings and procedures. Nicklin instituted a cabinet secretariat in 1957 that was intended to improve decision making and provide other ministers with

single-page summaries of items to be discussed by cabinet. Nicklin also insisted on conventions to preserve the collective solidarity of cabinet as a political forum. Matters did not proceed if cabinet was divided along party lines (that is, six CP ministers to five Liberals), nor did cabinet vote on issues when the Premier and Deputy Premier were clearly at odds over a proposal. Nicklin was also a firm believer in holding country cabinets: convening cabinet meetings outside Brisbane so that the government could establish closer relations with local authorities and communities throughout the state. By early 1963, the Nicklin cabinet had met on 15 separate occasions outside Brisbane.

The second Nicklin ministry was the last ministry fully elected by the Coalition party membership in the Parliament. Thereafter Coalition ministries became a mixture of ministers appointed by the leaders and elected by the party room. The Country Party, in particular, was concerned that the mechanism of selection to the ministry could become too democratic, possibly compromising the internal cohesion of the ministry or restricting the scope of the leader. To provide greater flexibility for the leader, the Country Party amended its internal rules during the government's second term. At the 1961 state conference, the party decided that henceforth the party leader could either personally choose ministers or agree to selection by party-room ballot. Subsequent Country/National Party leaders then exploited this provision to enhance their control of the ministry and backbench.

Conflicts in the governing Coalition

Coalition conflict began to surface during the government's second term and one of the first indications of discord arose over the selection of the Coalition's second Speaker. In its first term, the Coalition government nominated Alan Fletcher (CP, Darling Downs) as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly (effective from 27 September 1957). The appointment was not contentious. Fletcher served one term as Speaker before resigning the position on 15 June 1960 to fill a vacancy in the second ministry. This left an administrative hiatus between parliaments, which was seen by some members as a problem. At the opening of the first session of the thirty-fifth Parliament, Jack Pizzey, the Minister for Education and Migration, nominated the Country Party's preferred candidate, David Nicholson (CP, Murrumba), to be the new Speaker. There was considerable interest in the speakership among the governing parties and both the Country and Liberal Parties had proposed candidates requiring a Coalition joint-party ballot. A head-to-head contest occurred between Nicholson and a respected Liberal member, the serving Chairman of Committees, Harold Taylor (Lib., Clayfield). Subsequently, in the House, members from both sides of the Chamber

drew attention to the intense contest for the position and the ‘manoeuvrings that have gone on behind the scenes’ (*QPD* 1960:vol. 227, p. 20). Such overt (or mismanaged) challenges between candidates for the position of speakership on the floor of the Parliament were not unknown, but the only previous occasion on which a challenge had taken place in public was in 1912, when a secret ballot was conducted by the parliamentary clerk.

In the early 1960s, the procedures for the election of a speaker were lax and basically non-existent. A tradition had developed whereby outspoken members would use the occasion to cover all manner of interests and personal obsessions. Before a formal chair had been appointed the House was under no-one’s control, and the points raised by members could range widely and not necessarily concern the functions of the speakership or parliamentary procedures. In August 1960, the ‘debate’ over Nicholson’s appointment rambled on for three hours. Tom Aikens (NQLP, Townsville South) exploited the opportunity to criticise both the ‘flippant attitude’ of the judiciary to the road toll and drunken drivers and the difficulty of raising matters of concern about the judiciary under standing orders once the Speaker was appointed (*QPD* 1960:vol. 227, p. 6). Enjoying the freedom of speaking on his pet concerns while no-one was in a position to prevent him, he also volunteered himself as Speaker at one stage of the debate, but was without support from other members. Ted Walsh (then QLP, Bundaberg), in a ‘marathon speech of almost two hours’ (Lack 1962:580), complained of unfair election tactics used against him, criticised the Queensland Club as a ‘den of iniquity’, attacked Russian communism, argued with Aikens about the Labor government’s role in the 1948 railway strike and called for an ‘appropriate authority to administer the affairs of the House during that interval between the dissolution and the reassembly of Parliament’ (*QPD* 1960:vol. 227, p. 14). Walsh then mischievously nominated Harold Taylor as Speaker against Nicholson. The Liberal’s candidate had already been unsuccessful in the party room and, although some residual resentment remained, Taylor declined the nomination (anxious to avoid ‘ratting’ on party colleagues; see Lack 1962:580–1). Walsh then chose to nominate Eric Gaven (CP, South Coast) although this move lapsed for want of a seconder. Nicholson was then elected unopposed even though he was seen as relatively inexperienced (with only 10 years in parliament and limited charring experience). Harold Taylor was subsequently re-elected as Chairman of Committees—a consideration contingent on his declining the speakership nomination.

In congratulating Nicholson, the renegade Tom Aikens warned:

You have been in the House for 10 years, Mr Speaker, and you have seen how I have had to fight to retain for myself even the meagre rights and privileges that were grudgingly granted to me by a succession of

Speakers, and by others, and I will continue to fight...I want to remind you that, if you care to try to do what some of the previous Speakers have done—if you think that you can persecute and intimidate me—you are welcome to have a go. (*QPD* 1960:vol. 227, pp. 24–5)

Although his election to office was rocky, Nicholson began a term as Speaker that was to last 11 years and nine months, making him the longest-serving occupant of the position in the history of the Parliament. He soon grew in the job and gained some respect from both sides of the House generally for his even-handedness—although many of his procedural rulings were partisan and some were directly challenged by the opposition and outspoken independents. Nicholson was reappointed by three further parliaments (effectively by the government), retiring after the thirty-ninth Parliament on 25 May 1972.

Other Coalition conflicts were quick to emerge within the ministry. In August 1960, the Opposition Leader, Jack Duggan, accused the government of orchestrating the ‘expulsion’ of the Public Lands Minister, Alf Muller, from the second Nicklin ministry ostensibly over a ‘taxation matter’. The official reason given for Muller’s demise was that he had committed a personal indiscretion, whereas Duggan suggested that this was simply a catalyst and that the real reason was an internal Coalition dispute over land politics. Although previously a deputy leader of the Country Party from 1949 to 1957 while the party was in opposition, Muller had become a ‘bunny’ because he ‘was game enough to stand up to people who were endeavouring to gain some advantage for themselves’, particularly large land owners and party supporters. Providing a colourful account of Muller’s performance, Duggan maintained that

he does not have the sartorial elegance of the Liberals; he does not come in here dressed in suits made by the best tailors of the State; he does not have the vocal eloquence of the Treasurer and some of his other Liberal colleagues who occupy the Ministerial bench, but he was always a fearless and hard-hitting debater. Whatever else he may not have possessed, he certainly had the attributes of being a hard worker, having a sincerity of purpose and a high degree of common sense. We on this side differed with him very much on the Government’s handling of their land policy...but I know that the Liberal people who had access to the entrepreneurs and real estate agencies, and the big graziers who threw their money at the Government, thought it would be better to deal with someone who had a less strong view on the cutting up of big estates. (*QPD* 1960:vol. 227, p. 104)

Duggan challenged the government to ‘deny that they forced out their hardest and best-working Minister by using this tax matter as a device’ (*QPD* 1960:vol.

227, p. 104). The opposition generally regarded Muller's resignation with some scepticism, labelling the episode the 'Muller muddle' in the House (*QPD* 1960:vol. 228, pp. 1812–13). In his own defence, Muller claimed that he had been given the 'sack' after he put up a 'long fight to protect the Crown estate' (*QPD* 1960:vol. 227, p. 651). As an illustration of Muller's depth of feeling against his colleagues, he told the Parliament:

To my constituents and to the people of Queensland in general, let me say that I can be of greater service as an Independent than by sticking to a party led by Mr Nicklin and Mr Morris. I do not want to say the whole thing, of course, has weakened my confidence in Mr Nicklin, as far as Mr Morris is concerned, I never had any. (*QPD* 1960:vol. 227, p. 652)

This admission did not dampen suspicions that pressure had been placed on the government by vested interests to remove Muller from his portfolio, ostensibly over the taxation incident. It also subsequently transpired that the Premier, attempting to seek a way to ease the sacking (but against the wishes of the cabinet), had suggested to Muller that his exit could be accommodated by the Premier seeming to offer him another unacceptable portfolio, which he would then publicly reject. This was the second dumping of Muller by his parliamentary party colleagues, as Jack Pizzey had earlier deposed him from the deputy leader's position when the Coalition secured government. Not surprisingly, Muller became somewhat embittered over the incidents.

Conflicts also deepened within sections of the Coalition's support base. Relations deteriorated in the early 1960s between the Transport Minister, Gordon Chalk, and the road transport hauliers. As minister, Chalk faced the wrath of the industry for regulating the road transport industry and restricting access to road hauliers, especially in regional Queensland. From the Country Party's perspective, the government was principally concerned with keeping farm costs down and freight charges low to farmers (while extracting some 'contribution' from road hauliers for the roads they used). The Premier, Frank Nicklin, also stated in 1960 that the government 'would not allow road transport free use of the roads'. Regulation was needed to avoid the indiscriminate use of the roads by transport firms because, in the Premier's words, 'if transport companies could operate as they liked there would be chaos on the roads'. He also added that the public had '£55 million invested in railroads and this had to be protected' (*Courier-Mail*, 9 April 1960). Additionally, the government was worried that Queensland freight intended for the railways was being 'stolen' by 'border-hoppers' in the road transport industry operating from across the NSW border. The local road transport industry, thus, felt squeezed from two sides: by government-subsidised rail and by NSW poachers. The *Courier-Mail* (9 April 1962) warned before the 1963 election that 'on the domestic front, the

Government will have to do battle with an active road transport lobby. It has no easy solution here, with policy directed at removing the complaints of groups of primary producers, rather than of the road transport industry.’

The ill feeling was such that the road hauliers deliberately stood candidates against sitting government members particularly targeting those they felt were hostile to their cause. Although some impetus was generated in the Parliament (see Chapter 5) over state transport, the hauliers did not manage to dislodge any official Coalition candidates and their campaign gradually came to a halt.

Changing the rules

To augment its support base for the 1963 election, the Coalition reintroduced legislation in December 1962 to provide for compulsory preferential voting. The decision was not, however, uniformly welcomed. In essence, the voting change allowed the Coalition parties to contest selected seats against each other without unduly ‘wasting’ votes as occurred under the first-past-the-post system. The decision to reintroduce preferential voting, taken in November by the combined Coalition parliamentary representatives, was only narrowly passed with some reports claiming the proposal succeeded by only one vote, but in fact the vote was 24–21 in favour (*Truth*, 4 November 1962). Earlier, in September, a team of four MLAs (Alan Munro and Bill Knox from the Liberals, and Harold Richter and Ron Camm from the Country Party) had considered the issue and presented a report to both parties recommending preferential voting (but with the two Country Party members still perceiving party advantage in simple majority voting). The Liberals were again the strongest supporters, with many Country Party members either ambivalent or hostile to the idea. The latter’s opposition was based less on principle (although some favoured a compulsory preferential system whereas the Liberals tended to favour optional preferential) than on the likely effects of the voting mathematics on its own electoral prospects. Coalition divisions over the proposal were reportedly ‘bitter’, pitting ‘friend against friend’; but two agreements helped ease tensions. In July 1962, the organisational leaders of the respective Coalition parties (Liberal President, A. S. Hulme, and Country Party President, A. G. Lawrie) announced an ‘agreement on seat entitlement’ in which both agreed to respect each other’s territory and limit its own candidates by standing 36 candidates each at the following elections (*Courier-Mail*, 13 July 1962). Although the agreement was made by the respective party organisations, it was difficult to enforce over the local branches. In particular, the Liberals began to exceed their seat quota, feeling the agreed limit held them back and curtailed their political ambitions. The next March, the continuing depth of ill

feeling led to a second agreement—a mutual ‘no poaching pact’—designed to minimise Coalition challenges and restrict the Liberal Party to contesting no more than 39 seats (*Sunday Mail*, 3 March 1963).

Although the decision to implement preferential voting was designed to suit conservative interests, a further consequence was to revitalise the spirits of the QLP, since the party was rapidly collapsing under the simple majority voting system (and with Gair wondering whether it would be worth standing at all without preferential voting). With the prospect of gaining preferences, the QLP stood more candidates in the 1963 election and expected to capture some ALP seats with conservative preferences. Hence, the Coalition’s decision was of double benefit to its cause: it maximised its own vote and enabled the QLP to survive, which thereby sustained the thorn in the side of the ALP.

Parliament did not sit for eight months in 1963—from its adjournment on 6 December 1962 until 20 August 1963, well after the June state election.

Conclusion

The Coalition had a shaky start in government. They were not necessarily consummate politicians or particularly ambitious. They were motivated by the desire to remain in government, which meant walking a fine line between undertaking popular and unpopular measures and not unduly antagonising the electorate. Nicklin’s concern was to provide a united government and collaborative ministry that was based on mutual respect and was largely insulated from the structural, organisational and philosophical conflicts dividing the Coalition parties. Such insulation between the executive and its constituent parties, however, eventually nurtured the seeds of the Coalition’s own destruction.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the senior Coalition members often had years of political and parliamentary experience on which to draw. They treated the Parliament with a certain degree of decorum and respect, but (just like their Labor predecessors) were not predisposed to provide the opposition with sufficient resources or adequate opportunities to scrutinise government performance. Having learned many parliamentary tactics from years of watching Labor control the House, the Coalition knew how to use parliamentary procedures to good effect as a way of limiting scrutiny of the executive.

In these early years, as Chapter 5 shows, the government never really developed a keen legislative appetite. On occasions, the Parliament was not recalled for want of government business. The Parliament did not sit at all during the first

eight months of 1963 awaiting the state election—a practice that was accepted as normal in the context of an election year. Yet the legislation it did champion reflected mainly the Country Party’s principal interests and concerns after so long in opposition.