

## **4. Safely in the saddle: the Nicklin government, 1963–1968**

Premier Frank Nicklin served almost four terms as leader of the Coalition. Despite his age and gradually deteriorating physical condition, he was prevailed on to remain in the job after the 1963 election and to postpone plans to retire. There were no eager leadership challengers or anxious pretenders waiting in the wings. When the time came for a change of leader, seniority would determine the next in line—a promotion principle used generally by both Coalition parties in settling leadership questions. In the mid-1960s, the Coalition team was relieved to be in government and Nicklin was their most attractive asset with the electorate. Eventually, he continued in office until he was seventy-two years of age, retiring simultaneously from the premiership and leadership of the Country Party on 17 January 1968. By that stage, a smooth leadership transition was envisaged, with the deputy Country Party leader, Jack Pizzey, anointed as his successor. Even the best-laid plans, however, sometimes go astray.

### **The 1963 election: the first using compulsory preferential voting**

The thirty-sixth Parliament was dissolved in December 1962 and the Parliament did not meet in 1963 until after the election, which was held on 1 June. The 1963 state election was the first postwar election conducted on a compulsory preferential voting system and a record total of 240 candidates stood for the 78 Legislative Assembly seats. Labor contested every seat and won one uncontested. The Coalition stood 73 candidates (the Liberals standing 38 and the Country Party 35). Despite the setback of 1960, the QLP managed to field 60 candidates—three more than the previous time. The other candidates consisted of three communist candidates, nine Social Credit League candidates and 18 independents. The Coalition could afford to drop only eight seats before losing majority government, whereas the ALP had to win 14 seats to win government in its own right. Should either of the major-party blocks not achieve a majority, it would have been interesting to discover which side the QLP would have supported as a minority government. Anecdotal evidence suggests that they would have leaned to the conservative (non-ALP) parties, but such a circumstance did not come about.

Given that Queensland had traditionally been a Labor state, early media assessments downplayed the chance of a third conservative victory for the Coalition. Opinion polls in 1962 seesawed, with Labor initially in front, then the Coalition took the lead and then they were shown neck-and-neck. QLP support had declined and was often less than 10 per cent (see *AJPH* 1963:vol. 9, no. 1, p. 100; Hughes 1969:192). The *Courier-Mail* predicted in 1962 that the government's performance implied the poll would be close and that the Coalition might have to rely on sympathetic independents to govern. The *Truth* reported in March 1962 that voters looked like ditching the incumbent government, predicting that Labor could gain about 18 seats—enough to govern with a comfortable majority. A *Truth* (11 March 1962) columnist commented that only a 'political miracle' would save the government and, after conducting its own opinion survey, found that 'there is no doubt Labor confidence is well based'. The *Courier-Mail* (11 March 1963) by then was even more blunt: 'can the Nicklin–Morris Government win a third term...at the moment the answer would be no.' Nevertheless, as a pro-government paper in those days, the *Courier-Mail* urged its state-wide readership to vote for the Coalition because of its record on state development and to preserve stability. Labor could not be entrusted with office, according to the editorial writers, because it was influenced too much by left-wing unions and would harm business confidence. As it transpired, the media's early prognoses of a likely rebuff to the Coalition subsequently proved to be flawed.

Unemployment, employment relations, road transport and land policy were the prominent policy issues of the campaign, although Hughes (1969:183) fails to classify anything 'approaching a "Big Issue" in Queensland in 1963 or 1966'. Unemployment was a particularly emotive issue in a state so dependent on seasonal employment and vulnerable industries. Unemployment levels had risen to more than 30 000 in February 1962 and had dropped only slightly to 26 600 a year later. By the eve of the election in late May, however, the registered unemployed had fallen to 14 600—thus defusing the potency of the issue as a political factor. For those in employment, the promises of three weeks' annual leave and shorter working hours were much more important; and as well as the state council of the Liberal Party calling for three weeks' annual leave, a petition to this effect organised by trade unions and signed by 7000 electors was presented to the Parliament in late 1962 (*AJPH* 1963:vol. 9, no. 1, p. 100; *Courier-Mail*, 3 November 1962). A protracted industrial dispute at the Moura coalfield from February to April shaped up as an election issue mainly because the dispute tested the strength of industrial labour against a state minister (Ernest Evans). The dispute also counter-posed union demands for improved wages against the poor living conditions of workers engaged on the coalfields—described by a tribunal arbitrator as 'nauseating, revolting and degrading' (Hughes 1969:202).

Road haulage continued to dog the government as an issue (see Hazlehurst 1987). Primary producers had long complained about the provision and costs of road and rail transport. Farmers were interested in cheap, effective farm-gate road haulage, whereas the haulage industry was subject to cartelisation and zoned into non-competitive areas. Government backbenchers, such as Joh Bjelke-Petersen, had already complained that it was not ‘always practicable to use the railways because they are not flexible enough to give the service that can be given by other more modern forms of transport’ and that ‘when people in some parts of the State’s [sic] are offered concessional freight rates such as those offered in the south-western corner of the State, someone elsewhere has to pay’ (*QPD* 1962:vol. 231, pp. 1365, 1364). At a public meeting in Roma, Bjelke-Petersen publicly fought with Gordon Chalk and Frank Nicklin over the issue of cheaper freight charges for farmers. The government found it difficult to resolve the issues because they feared the powerful road transport lobby, which began threatening to stand candidates in safe Country Party seats in the state’s south-east. Land policy was also contentious in four respects. The Coalition government had come under increasing pressure over the ‘rapid development’ of land by property promoters on the south coast. There were suggestions of government collusion over property speculation, even that developers were sometimes aided by government subsidies, which were then ‘repaid’ by lavish parties for invited political guests (see *QPD* 1962:vol. 231, pp. 1263–4). Large increases in land tax for city landowners had occurred in 1962. In addition, suburban residents faced large increases in land valuations for their own blocks (on which their rates bills were set). Brisbane land valuations (in 13 ratings districts) had risen by 200 per cent on average during early 1962—and criticism of the Valuer-General washed over to the government (*Courier-Mail*, 10 May 1962). Finally, the government’s attitude towards rural land had come under criticism—from rural pastoralists eager to move from leasehold to freehold land and the opposition, which criticised the government for plundering the Crown’s assets.

The campaign speeches were becoming a highly structured technique of electioneering. By later standards, the speeches were overly long and filled with excessive detail. Although none of the policy speeches was regarded as particularly ‘striking’ by contemporary commentators, some parties were praised for making ‘constructive’, ‘well-considered’ and ‘interesting suggestions’ even though there was ‘little that was new’ overall (see *AJPH* 1963:vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 187–9). The QLP’s leader, Paul Hilton, was the first to launch his party’s campaign, on 29 April (fully 32 days before the poll). Labor came next, with its leader, Jack Duggan, splitting his address over two days (2 and 3 May), with the first speech to an audience of 200 stalwarts attacking the government’s record and presenting Labor’s general commitments, and the second speech focusing explicitly on rural and land policy. Labor’s strategy was to challenge the

Country Party head-to-head for rural and provincial votes. Duggan criticised the government for a 'giant propaganda campaign' that pretended 'everything in the garden was rosy' when 'there is not much to the claims they make'. In his speech, he argued that the 'Premier's Department is now staffed by five trained journalists, and the Government has spent a great deal of public money on propaganda and booklets to point out—in a manner I think unjust and unfair—the Government's achievements' (*Courier-Mail*, 27 May 1963). According to Labor, the government had failed to redress structural problems within the state's economy and had presided over high levels of unemployment running at between 3 and 4 per cent in 1963 (and even higher among so-called 'juvenile unemployment'). In contrast, Labor promised to 'restore full employment'. Labor also offered a series of improved industrial conditions (three weeks' annual leave, better long-service leave, equal pay for women, apprenticeship reforms), plus price controls for subsistence items, low-interest housing loans, more rental housing, police reform, improved TAB regulation and a review of liquor laws. The ALP's rural policy commitments included a rural finance board, reform to land usage, water conservation, irrigation and improved rural communications, assistance with marketing and research, together with various subsidies and assistance schemes for primary industries (dairy, tobacco, wheat). To convey his message to provincial voters, Duggan chartered a light plane for a six-day speaking tour of regional centres. When in Charters Towers, Duggan told supporters that the ALP would fight for full citizenship for Aboriginal people.

Once again, the Coalition divided the government's policy speech between the Premier and Liberal Deputy Premier, delivered on 7 and 9 May respectively. In Maroochydore, Nicklin reminded voters of the confidence of investors in his government, of the 'unexampled progress' in state development and gave a 'guarantee that in our lifetime Queensland will become the greatest state in the Commonwealth' (*Courier-Mail*, 8 May 1963). Queensland was entering the 'golden Sixties'—the confidence of investors was now restored and 'wise state legislation had led to the finding of oil' (*Courier-Mail*, 28 May 1963). The economy was healthy, he maintained, because of the government's record, which included: extensive road-building (including 'beef-cattle roads'), 'a new deal to the landholder', record spending on public works, oil discovery and the planned construction of two oil refineries, the Mount Isa–Townsville railway, Comalco's £25 million alumina plant at Gladstone and more generally increases in exports, investments and savings. Nicklin made much of his government's relaxation of oil exploration leases and looked to Queensland becoming a commercial oil-producing state. The health of the state's economy was also recognised, according to Nicklin later in the campaign, by the independent Arbitration Court, which on the basis of economic growth had granted three weeks' annual leave for award workers (a move that effectively negated the need

for statutory provisions for three weeks' leave as advocated by the opposition). The court's decision was interpreted as a vindication of the government's 'non-decision' stance in refusing to consider legislating for increased leave, while waiting for the Arbitration Court to award the increase. Nicklin later stated that the government had maintained an 'unswerving policy of support' for the Arbitration Court (*Courier-Mail*, 22 May 1963).

In a lengthy speech, Nicklin promised further reductions in probate, succession and gift duties, lifting the untaxed amount a man could leave to 'a wife or children under 21' from £4000 to £5000 and extending the 'widow's benefit' to either spouse. Demonstrating a degree of political nous, he promised that 'should the Government find itself in receipt of considerable revenues, such as oil royalties, we will be prepared to examine all forms of state taxation with a view to passing on still further benefits by way of either increased exemptions or by reduction in rates of tax' (*Courier-Mail*, 8 May 1963).

Nicklin promised to review rail freight rates and improve services through the so-called 'dieselisation program'—replacing steam trains with diesel locomotives. Country towns were promised electricity, water supplies, school swimming pools and other basic amenities. And for landholders, the government announced its continued commitment to transfer leasehold land to freehold title for farmers and pastoralists. Nicklin suggested that the 'paramount features of our land policy have been freeholding, security of tenure, establishment, and stabilisation of stud holdings, and a uniform approach to closer settlement based on living areas' (*Courier-Mail*, 8 May 1963). Nicklin ended his speech with a warning that Labor was 'unfitted and unworthy of the tasks and responsibilities of government'.

Despite his encroaching age, Nicklin was anxious to embark on the campaign trail, which would last the better part of a month. The Premier followed tradition by undertaking an extensive meet-the-people tour of the entire state. His physical presence throughout the state was intended as a reassuring gesture, an appearance of stability and continuity. For the rest of the campaign, Nicklin's tour progressed from country town to country town, but as election day approached, his performances changed. His speeches became less policy focused and his rhetoric far more of a strident attack on Labor's communist links. By the end of the campaign, in late May, he was actively campaigning on the stump and desperately kicking the communist can.

The Deputy Premier, Alan Munro, presented the Liberals' campaign slogan 'Keep Queensland Free in '63'—again hoping to make the opposition the pivotal issue of the election. He stressed the government's policy of diversification and regional development through the encouragement of manufacturing and large-scale industries (especially bauxite and oil). Mentioning achievements

in ministerial portfolios held by Liberals, Munro stressed commitments to education, claiming that 41 new high schools had been established in the past six years in office. Law reform and legal aid were promised. Other Liberals talked of ‘the tidal wave of expansion and prosperity that is already sweeping through Queensland’ (*Courier-Mail*, 31 May 1963). The Liberal Minister for Labour and Industry, Alex Dewar, claimed that since the Coalition had been in government, investment in secondary industry had been facilitated because much of the ‘red tape’ in the department had been eliminated. Mostly, however, Liberal promotional material was general and options canvassing rather than specific—with claims that Queensland would go back to becoming a ‘pick and shovel’ state if Labor won. The General Secretary of the Liberal Party, Charles Porter (later the Member for Toowong), argued on election eve that the main election issue was simple: ‘whether to go forward with a Liberal–Country Government that has already worked wonders with a great program of industrial expansion, or whether to go back to those dreary days when Labor—hostile to business and suspicious of all industrial development—deliberately discouraged investment and expansion’ (*Courier-Mail*, 31 May 1963).

Both Coalition partners attacked the extra-parliamentary ‘control’ seemingly imposed on the Labor leadership from the party organisation and trade unions. Liberal campaign advertisements showed a stark photograph of the Queensland Parliament with a shadow of the hammer and sickle superimposed over the legislature (a tactic Labor objected to strongly in the House immediately after the election; see Chapter 6; *QPD* 1963:vol. 235, p. 267). Its slogan ran: ‘Keep the Trades Hall Shadow off our Parliament’ (*Courier-Mail*, 23 May 1963). Nicklin said that ‘possibly the main issue to be decided at the election was whether Queenslanders wanted to be governed from Parliament House or the Trades Hall’ (*Courier-Mail*, 16 May 1963). He delved back into history and accused prominent Labor trade union leaders of running joint ‘unity tickets’ with known communists in union elections in the mid-1950s.

On the policy front, the Premier claimed Labor would nationalise key industries if returned to government. One suggestion was that Labor would nationalise the operations and cancel government contracts at the recently discovered Moonie oil field (a suggestion rejected by Duggan in Labor’s opening speech). Left-wing influence was a sensitive issue in the context of Cold War geopolitics and conservative accusations that Labor was ‘socialistic’ or union dominated had the potential to damage Labor’s vote (although the real impact on the ALP’s state-wide vote is disputable). Parallels were drawn between the state ALP and the ‘faceless men’ dictating federal ALP policy after the federal leaders Arthur Calwell and Gough Whitlam were caught sitting outside Canberra’s Kingston Hotel awaiting the party’s decision on its attitude to US communications installations in Australia. Although Jack Duggan explicitly denied in his policy

speech that Labor would be dominated by extra-parliamentary interests, the impression stuck and appeared to dampen the resurgence of ALP support across the state.

Inter-party animosity between the two Labor Parties was again a feature of the campaign. The QLP, after formally affiliating with the southern DLP in November 1962, was vehement in its attack on the ALP, claiming that the party was a front for communism and that ‘the ALP under [its] present leadership must be smashed and broken for [the] security of Australia’ (QLP, *The Standard*, 1963). Such attacks seemed to encourage retaliation. ALP demonstrators disrupted some QLP political meetings and speeches. Occasionally tempers flared and hecklers became abusive or resorted to fighting to settle scores. At one Brisbane meeting of the QLP, the fisticuffs turned into an ‘all-in’ street brawl between QLP and ALP supporters, who fought on the footpath outside the Norman Hotel for a good 20 minutes. The melee involved the former leader, Vince Gair, who reportedly tried to intervene to end the fighting, but who later said ‘our blokes looked after themselves all right’ (*Truth*, 19 May 1963).

To give some bite to its bark, the QLP decided to punish the ALP at the ballot box. The QLP’s previous leader, Gair, had declared in July 1962 that if preferential voting were introduced, the breakaway party would allocate its preferences to the Liberal and Country Parties. This was an act of revenge politics in an atmosphere of intense animosity. In the event, as Hughes (1969:12–15) has recorded, the impact of preferential voting across the state was less significant than expected. Hughes (1969:14) found that only in three seats ‘did the preferences change the result from a first-past-the-post count’. Although a handful of Coalition candidates relied on preferences to achieve a majority, the QLP’s preferences were instrumental only in assisting two Liberal candidates over the line (Peter Delamothe and Merv Anderson). Both had come from behind to win with QLP preferences. The only other seat affected (Fassifern) involved a contest between Alf Muller (the ex-Country Party Lands Minister, who was contesting the election as an independent) and his official Country Party challenger, Albert Hall (whose parents must have had a sense of humour!). Despite coming second in the primary vote (with Hall on 3211 votes to Muller’s 3028), Muller narrowly held the seat after the distribution of ALP and QLP preferences; but then, before the next election, he rejoined the Country Party in September 1965.<sup>1</sup> The relatively slight impact of preferential

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<sup>1</sup> His rejoining came after lengthy meetings between himself, the County Party’s President, John Ahern (the father of Mike Ahern, later Premier), and the local Fassifern electorate committee, involving an agreement to run Muller as the official Country Party candidate for Fassifern in the 1966 elections—a contest he won before standing down at the 1969 elections.

voting probably ensured its survival, especially given that some in the Country Party were already having second thoughts immediately after they had decided to reintroduce the system for the 1963 election (*Courier-Mail*, 3 November 1962).

Despite predictions of a close result, the final outcome largely maintained the status quo. The Coalition was returned with exactly the same number of seats it had held in the previous Parliament. Many commentators found the result surprising precisely because little change occurred. Certainly, the decision to adopt compulsory preferential voting advantaged the Coalition but proved of negligible significance to the QLP. The Coalition again stood 73 candidates and its vote remained remarkably stable at 44.06 per cent—up slightly from the 1960 result when it captured 43.52 per cent. While the Country Party's vote fell back by 0.5 per cent, the Liberals' total rose by 1 per cent. Once again, the Liberals outpollled the Country Party by 23.75 per cent to 20.31 per cent, but the Liberals stood 38 candidates to the Country Party's 35. This level of support translated into 46 seats (20 for the Liberals and 26 for the Country Party). In contrast, the ALP stood 77 candidates and received 43.83 per cent of the primary vote (up by 4 per cent from 1960), but received only 26 seats in the Parliament (one of which was uncontested by other candidates). In other words, standing roughly the same number of candidates, and achieving virtually the same proportion of the primary vote, the Coalition secured 46 seats to the ALP's 26.

On state-wide figures, the Coalition managed to gain just 1877 votes more than Labor from a total electorate of 770 998. Had proportional representation been in place for the election, the Coalition would have won 34 of the available 78 seats to Labor's 34, with six QLP seats and four independents.

Duggan blamed the 'gerrymander' for restricting Labor's gains despite a 4 per cent rise in the primary vote. He claimed that the Coalition had benefited from a 'slander' campaign against the ALP and that 'smears made about the Labor Party have stuck to some extent, without justification. Time will erase the false image created by dishonest propaganda' (*Sunday Mail*, 2 June 1963). The ALP secretary produced figures after the election to illustrate that the Country Party had received 156 594 votes in the state for 26 seats, whereas Labor had polled 337 861 votes and achieved only the same number of seats (*Truth*, 15 September 1963). The Country Party had, however, stood only half the number of candidates compared with Labor.

New members in the Parliament were: the Liberal reformers John Murray, Geoffrey Chinchin and William Lickiss, together with Henry McKechnie (CP) and Edwin Wallis-Smith and Peter Wood from the ALP. Shortly after the election, the former Agriculture Minister, Otto Madsen (CP, Warwick) died suddenly. At the ensuing by-election, the Country Party's David Cory narrowly held the seat, suffering a 10 per cent swing against him (Hughes and Graham 1974:280).

## Nicklin's expanded third ministry

The first session of the thirty-seventh Parliament was opened on 20 August 1963. Parliament had not sat since 7 December 1962. The previous ministry was retained for a little more than one month while the Premier introduced legislation to increase the number of ministers by two. Consequently, the third Nicklin ministry was not announced to the Parliament until 26 September 1963.

The ministry was expanded under the provisions of the *Officials in Parliament Act* from 11 ministers to 13. This meant the Country Party retained seven portfolios to the Liberals' six. The two new members appointed to cabinet were the long-serving Johannes Bjelke-Petersen (first elected to parliament in 1947 and subsequently to become a future leader of the Country Party and State Premier) and Peter Delamothe, who had served for just one term in parliament but who would serve for eight years as a competent and innovative Attorney-General. Some scholars of Queensland politics have described Delamothe as one of the best Coalition ministers of the era with perhaps the exception of Jack Pizzey. While Delamothe was elected by his Liberal peers to the position, Bjelke-Petersen was appointed at the discretion of the Premier. Bjelke-Petersen would become an astute Minister for Works, using his portfolio and position to enhance his influence within the wider Country Party and business networks. From the mid-1960s, he began to perfect a system of patronage based on the deployment of capital works and infrastructure in return for political payoffs and support. He had obviously more going for him than that, however, otherwise every Works Minister would end up premier! Nicklin also abolished the ministerial title of Chief Secretary from his own portfolio.

The ministry was

- Premier and Minister for State Development: Frank Nicklin, CP
- Minister for Industrial Development: Alan Munro, Lib.
- Minister for Education: Jack Pizzey, CP
- Treasurer: Tom Hiley, Lib.
- Minister for Mines and Main Roads: Ernest Evans, CP
- Minister for Health: Dr Winston Noble, Lib.
- Minister for Transport: Gordon Chalk, Lib.
- Minister for Lands: Alan Fletcher, CP
- Minister for Local Government and Conservation: Harold Richter, CP
- Minister for Labour and Industry: Alex Dewar, Lib.
- Minister for Primary Industries: John Row, CP
- Minister for Works and Housing: Johannes Bjelke-Petersen, CP

- Minister for Justice and Attorney-General: Dr Peter Delamothe, Lib.

The expansion of the ministry allowed for a more extensive reorganisation of the portfolio responsibilities. Under the new ministry, the Premier assumed an active responsibility for state development. This acknowledged that the Premier's office was the main decision-making authority on development matters and the avenue through which business proposals, investments and new projects were often negotiated. It also brought formal responsibilities into line with prevailing practice, recognising that the Premier's office was responsible for coordination and frequently engaged in direct horse-trading with business over terms, conditions and economic incentives. Industrial development was also elevated to the Deputy Premier and identified as a separate senior portfolio responsibility. Such a move highlighted *industrial* development over other types of economic development. It also emphasised the importance of industry over the other components of the previous 'grab bag' portfolio containing mines, main roads and electricity.

A series of other substantial portfolio changes was made—from the relatively conventional and somewhat anachronistic composition of earlier ministries. Home Affairs was jettisoned. Migration was removed from education and dispensed with altogether. The portfolio of Local Government and Public Works was separated. Responsibility for irrigation was removed from Public Lands and reconstituted as conservation and combined with local government. This was the first time that environmental and conservation responsibilities had been recognised symbolically within a specific ministerial title. The Department of Agriculture and Forestry became the Department of Primary Industries, with the government expecting it to broaden its sphere of activities. Housing was uncoupled from the Treasury portfolio and incorporated into a new ministry with works. Specific responsibility for electricity was dropped as a ministerial title. Finally, in the portfolio restructuring, the duties of one continuing minister, Ernest Evans, were lessened, leaving him with the peculiar combination of mines and main roads.

The hierarchy of the ministers in the new ministry was largely as it had been in the previous Parliament, with seniority in the ministry a key determinant of position. Three Liberals received promotions in the rankings—namely, Tom Hiley, Winston Noble and Gordon Chalk—while Alan Fletcher in the Country Party was elevated from last on the ministerial list to eighth.

Changes in the third ministry were brought about by turnovers in the Liberal Party leadership during the Parliament. Alan Munro resigned as Deputy Premier, Liberal Party leader and Minister for Industrial Development in January 1965, but remained in the Parliament as a backbencher until the election of 1966. The *Queensland Parliamentary Handbook* records that Munro resigned the Deputy Premiership on 23 December 1965 but this is incorrect; he resigned all his

positions in January—and officially his membership of the Executive Council (*Queensland Government Gazette Extraordinary*, 28 January 1965, no. 22). Munro was replaced as party leader for almost one year by Tom Hiley, who had previously been leader of the Queensland People's Party and then the Liberal Party from 1948 to 1954. The appointment of Hiley—then aged sixty—to the leadership was a transitional and largely 'honorific' arrangement, which paid 'tribute for past services' and gave him due recognition in government (Hughes 1969:79, 1980:32). Following Liberal conventions, Hiley was simply next in line for the post. Significantly, he was the first Liberal to hold simultaneously the positions of Deputy Premier, party leader and Treasurer (positions that later became fused in conventional Coalition arrangements). At the helm of the party, Hiley's tenure was short-lived and in June 1965 he announced of his own volition that he would not stand at the next state election and would resign his leadership at the end of the year (he had apparently promised his wife he would resign). He duly resigned his three leadership positions in December 1965, causing a more substantial ministerial reshuffle. Hiley then moved to the backbench briefly and, along with Munro, stepped down from parliament at the next state election in May 1966. The Liberal candidate chosen to replace Hiley for the seat of Chatsworth was W. D. (Bill) Hewitt, a thirty-four-year-old business manager who had been active in the Young Liberals and would become one of the avid 'reformers' inside the government known as the 'ginger group'. He had a background in 'time and motion' studies and long attempted to persuade his parliamentary colleagues to improve their own efficiency in assembly debates and over scrutinising legislation.

The parliamentary Liberals' decision to recycle Hiley as party leader was symptomatic of deeper divisions in the party. After Munro resigned and Hiley accepted the leadership in January 1965, the deputy's position was contested by two senior ministers representing different wings of the Liberal Party. Gordon Chalk (the Transport Minister and an ardent Coalition loyalist) was challenged in the election for the position of deputy leader by Alex Dewar (then the Minister for Labour and Industry but about to be appointed the Minister for Industrial Development in January 1965), representing the 'ultra-Liberals', who were anxious to push Liberal interests even at the expense of Coalition interests. In the event, Chalk managed to win but only by the narrow margin of just two votes. At the end of 1965, Hiley then vacated the parliamentary leadership and was replaced by Chalk, who was elected only after a fierce party-room struggle. Chalk was again challenged by Alex Dewar, but managed to win by a slightly greater margin of 12 votes to eight. Dewar then stood again for the deputy leadership position, this time against the Justice Minister, Dr Peter Delamothe. The party-room vote was tied at 10 votes all. In the fifth and final ballot, Dewar finally managed to gain a majority of 11 votes to nine (*Telegraph*, 8 December 1965). Trying to avoid such internal rifts, the Liberals then amended their party

procedures and conventions to allow the parliamentary leader to select the other ministers (and the deputy) rather than rely on a party-room election (*Courier-Mail*, 26 March 1966). A short time after, Chalk's main rival, Dewar, ran foul of the Liberal hierarchy and was eventually forced out of politics after being embarrassed by a personal scandal involving sexual harassment of departmental staff (see below).

Chalk became the fourth deputy Coalition leader to work with Nicklin since 1957. Before the Hiley/Chalk appointment, the Liberals' claim to the Deputy Premier's position had not been combined with the portfolio of Treasurer (although the Treasury portfolio had earlier been allocated to the Liberal partners in the Coalition). Not until Chalk became Liberal leader and Deputy Premier and Treasurer in December 1965 did the three positions become an expected norm in Coalition arrangements. At this stage, however, the position of 'Deputy Premier' was merely a title and status demarcation rather than a specific ministerial portfolio; subsequently the position of Deputy Premier was constituted as a portfolio area in its own right, in December 1974.

There were other changes among the Liberal members of the third ministry—some forced by circumstance. In March 1964, the Minister for Health, Dr Winston Noble, died suddenly while still in office. He was replaced in the Health portfolio by a new Liberal Minister, Seymour 'Doug' Tooth (Ashgrove), while Norman Lee (Liberal) won Noble's seat of Yeronga in a by-election in June 1964. After Munro quit the leadership, Alex Dewar, the Minister for Labour and Industry, was promoted to the position of Minister for Industrial Development in January 1965 under Hiley's brief leadership tenure—a ministerial portfolio that would be his last. Dewar's former Labour and Industry job was given to another new Liberal minister, John Herbert (Sherwood), who was the next most senior Liberal in the Assembly, defeating William Knox (Lib., Nundah) by 13 votes to seven in the party-room ballot. Herbert served as the Labour and Industry Minister for more than six years and remained in the Coalition ministry for more than 13 years. After Chalk moved to Treasury in December 1965, his Transport portfolio was assumed by the next in line, William Knox. In short, three new Liberal ministers entered the ministry in the period 1964–65: Doug Tooth, John Herbert and Bill Knox—each waiting his turn to enter the ministry according to his parliamentary seniority.

In contrast, the line-up of Country Party ministers was relatively stable. Only one change occurred and again this was through dint of circumstance. The long-serving member for Mirani, Ernest Evans, who entered the Parliament in 1947 and had served as the Minister for Mines and Main Roads since 1957, died on 28 February 1965; he was sixty-two years of age. His party colleague Ronald Camm replaced Evans on 11 March 1965. Camm would later challenge unsuccessfully for the leadership of the Country Party, in 1968, before becoming the 'younger'

deputy leader under Bjelke-Petersen. A few years after these events, Bjelke-Petersen claimed he had initially been offered the Mines and Main Roads portfolio when Evans died, but had turned it down (*Sunday Mail*, 9 March 1969).

With Munro's retirement and the sudden death of Evans in 1965, only four of the original 1957 Nicklin ministry remained in office by mid-1965 (namely—Nicklin, Pizzey, Hiley and Chalk). Three years later, Chalk would become the sole surviving member of the original cabinet.

## **Allegations of police corruption: the 'flawed' National Hotel inquiry**

The Parliament was one sanctuary in which members could raise contentious or potentially libellous issues without fear of civil action. Sometimes this privilege was used to smear individuals (a tactic that becomes abuse if the smear is for personal or selfish purposes). At other times, however, it was a useful accountability instrument that allowed serious allegations to be aired and investigated. In September 1962, allegations of mismanagement were raised in the Parliament about the Queensland Police Force, particularly concerning public complaints and the lack of responsible action from the Police Commissioner, Frank Bischof. The independent Member for Bundaberg, Ted Walsh, claimed that

there has been much unfavourable criticism of the administration of the Police Force in this State. It is useless blaming the subordinate ranks, and it is no good picking out individual policemen who may have been charged with bashing, or some other offence. These incidents can be encouraged only by weak supervision—the lead must come from the top. It does not matter whether it comes from the Commissioner's office or the chief of the CI [Criminal Investigation] Branch. (*QPD* 1962:vol. 233, p. 317)

He added that the 'administration of the Police Force cannot be expected to improve whilst it has a Commissioner who goes round glamorising, and opening agricultural shows and public functions'—to which Colin Bennett (ALP, South Brisbane) added that Commissioner Bischof 'reckons he is going to be the next Governor' (*QPD* 1962:vol. 233, p. 318). Walsh also attacked the notion that policemen had to make '25 arrests to prove his efficiency' as a 'silly idea'.

Later, during the supply debate on 29 October 1963 when the House was in committee scrutinising the estimates of the Department of Labour and Industry (under which the Police Department fell), further and more serious allegations

were made concerning the incidence of corruption, improper conduct and political collusion among senior police officers. Bennett, who was the opposition's main spokesman on police matters (and a lawyer), detailed specific instances of corruption and misconduct. He alleged that the Police Commissioner along with other officers had actively campaigned against the Labor opposition at the previous elections in 1963, claiming senior officers were currying political favour (see Chapter 6 for further details). More sensationally, however, he charged that

[t]he Police Force itself is seething with discontent. There are what might be termed camps in the Police Department, and police officers are in one camp or the other depending on the treatment that they are receiving from the Commissioner and some of his top colleagues...the Commissioner and his colleagues who frequent the National Hotel, encouraging and condoning the call-girl service that operates there, would be better occupied in preventing such activities rather than tolerating them. (*QPD* 1964:vol. 236, pp. 1061–2)

Such allegations were dynamite. The statement that the Police Commissioner was 'encouraging and condoning' prostitution operating from a city hotel—even though in the speech it was more of an aside—was a specific charge that could not easily be ignored. Initially, government members did not 'controversy' the allegations, preferring instead to continue with their prepared supply speeches. Gradually, however, the enormity of the allegation struck home and various government members took Bennett to task. That evening, the debate livened up considerably. One commentator later describing the parliamentary debate (James 1974:4) claimed that Bennett's allegations 'sparked off one of the most heated political discussions in years, brought government members back into the House, and caused the establishment of the Royal Commission'. Shortly before Bennett had spoken, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Eric Lloyd, had drawn the Chairman of Committee's attention to the fact that the House was not 'quorate' (that is, it did not have at least 16 members present excluding the chair) and only five government members were present.

John Herbert (Lib., Sherwood), who regarded himself as a 'decent' member of the House, claimed later that evening to have heard

the outpourings of a diseased mind. The accusations he made against Police Commissioner Bischof were so serious that he now has a clear duty to produce evidence to support the charges. If he does not do so, he must be branded as a character assassin of the lowest order and a man who would use the privileges of this Chamber to attack a public servant who has not the right of reply...If the hon. member can produce any

proof to support his charges, he can rest assured that this Government will take action. I challenge him to produce this proof. (*QPD* 1963:vol. 236, p. 1077)

The responsible minister, Alex Dewar, Minister for Labour and Industry, weighed in to read out the relevant sections of the *Police Act* that provided for the punishment or dismissal of corrupt officers ‘by the Commissioner’ (*QPD* 1963:vol. 236, p. 1087). Given that the allegations concerned the Commissioner himself, this defence missed the mark. Other attempts to rebut or comment on the allegations (by Doug Tooth, Ted Walsh and ‘Bunny’ Adair on 31 October) merely served to keep the issue alive. The Police Union also wrote to the minister asking for a full inquiry open to public scrutiny. Then on 5 November, the Premier announced in a ministerial statement that the government had ‘given serious consideration’ to Bennett’s claims especially in relation to the Commissioner and his colleagues. The Premier informed the Parliament that the government would take ‘appropriate action’ if Bennett ‘could make specific charges...that call for investigation’, to ‘give the names of credible witnesses prepared to give first-hand evidence’ and show that the persons charged are identifiable’ (*QPD* 1963:vol. 236, p. 1205). Nothing more was reported in the Parliament before the government announced the appointment of a royal commission on 12 November 1963 (*QPD* 1963:vol. 236, p. 1366). Outside the Parliament, however, a raging debate ensued—coming to a head when the *Courier-Mail* ran an editorial calling for a full inquiry. The editorial stated:

[O]nly a Royal Commission with [the] widest powers can clear the air now. Queensland’s police force has been under suspicion since an Opposition MP (Mr Bennett) made grave allegations against high police officers in Parliament last month. Despite public concern the Government has refused an open inquiry into the allegations on the plea that it wanted more concrete evidence. But the matter has refused to die down after this let’s-do-nothing decision. The Opposition Leader (Mr Duggan) has given the Government further material in a letter (contents still withheld from the public), and a Brisbane man has revealed that he is the one who gave information to Mr Duggan. The Government may feel that it is pursuing a wise policy of masterly inactivity. If so, the Government never made a bigger error. (*Courier-Mail*, 9 November 1963)

After receiving a report from the Crown Law Department on the allegations, Nicklin established a royal commission under Mr Justice Harry Gibbs (later to become Chief Justice of the High Court) to examine whether police misconduct had occurred and whether a prostitution service operated from the National Hotel. The terms of reference announced in the Parliament limited the investigation to one hotel, the National Hotel, and to selected police—both of which curtailed the scope of the commission. The inquiry quickly established that the National

Hotel was a popular venue for police functions and, along with the Grand Central Hotel with its 'Passion Pit' and 'Red Lounge', had become hang-outs for 'good-time girls'. A string of hotel waiters gave evidence that many women frequented the pubs but they could not tell whether they were prostitutes. Few witnesses came forward with specific allegations.<sup>2</sup> In the new year, the Commissioner, Frank Bischof, gave evidence at the hearings denying all charges and claiming that to his knowledge no prostitution racket operated from the hotels. The hotel proprietor, William 'Roley' Roberts, also gave evidence refuting allegations that prostitutes operated from his pub, blaming business rivals and other publicans for having 'pushed along' the call-girl rumours to damage his business because they were envious of his trade (*Courier-Mail*, 25 January 1964).

The report on the National Hotel inquiry was tabled in the Parliament in April 1964 (see *QPD* 1964:vol. 238, p. 11). Mr Justice Gibbs was concerned to establish that any evidence of misconduct should be proved 'beyond all reasonable doubt', rather than on the balance of probabilities. Not surprisingly, given the conspiracy of silence, he found little such hard evidence. Most of the report evaluated the character and testimony of the principal (non-police) witnesses, which were often unreliable or contradictory. Most had not managed to furnish absolute proof, any collaboration or detailed records to support their claims. Far less attention was paid to the police witnesses, some of whom were equally if not more unreliable, and to similar weaknesses in police testimony. Gibbs found that Commissioner Bischof had been unfairly maligned and that the state should pay his legal costs and that no 'culpable neglect' could be proven against any police in relation to the policing of the National Hotel. The exoneration of senior police subsequently encouraged police to become more brazen in condoning and seeking kickbacks from illegal activities, perhaps leading them to believe they were beyond the law and untouchable. Despite the narrow terms of reference, later events and a much more powerful second royal commission headed by Mr Justice Tony Fitzgerald in the late 1980s were to challenge and cast doubt on the flawed investigation conducted by Mr Justice Gibbs.

The National Hotel inquiry was not the subject of much immediate debate when the Parliament resumed in August 1964, and some members regarded Bennett as having made an error of judgment in not having all his facts established and verifiable (see *QPD* 1964:vol. 238, pp. 74, 165). Aikens questioned the cost involved in conducting the inquiry (£13 427) and later asked whether Bennett would be required to pay these costs. Police matters (especially discipline and transfers), however, continued to be regular topics of questions to the minister.

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<sup>2</sup> David Young and Shirley Briffman were the most prominent. Ominously, Briffman died in suspicious circumstances in March 1972 shortly after confessing to working as a prostitute between 1965 and 1969 and making allegations of misconduct and perjury against police officers Tony Murphy and Glen Hallahan—the latter of whom had faced earlier departmental charges but was let off after a secret inquiry.

In March 1965, Bennett was suspended from the House for five days after again raising police issues (the 'closure' of a police liquor canteen at the Roma Street station). After altercations with the Speaker, David Nicholson, over whether or not one of Bennett's written questions was tampered with, the debate degenerated until Bennett was suspended after a division (resulting in a vote for suspension of 40–23). The Speaker intervened in question time to take Bennett to task because he 'seizes every opportunity to criticise'. The *Hansard* transcript (QPD 1965:vol. 240, pp. 2523–4) continues as follows:

*Mr Speaker:* He runs to the Press with his complaints at every opportunity. Unfortunately, the Press believe him. I want the Press to understand that questions are altered or disallowed only when they do not conform to the Standing Orders.

*Mr Bennett:* I rise to a point of order. I strongly resent your personal attack on me. It is untrue...

*Mr Speaker:* Order!

*Mr Aikens:* 'The Courier-Mail' pays him dirt money.

*Mr Speaker:* Order! If the hon. member [Bennett] continues to interject during question time I will have no alternative but to deal with him under Standing Order No. 123A.

*Mr Bennett:* No-one is going to make untrue allegations about me...

*Mr Speaker:* Order... The hon. member for South Brisbane has continually interjected during question time, and under Standing Order 123A I ask him to leave the Chamber.

*Mr Bennett:* I would like to say...

*Mr Speaker:* Order!

*Mr Bennett:* Your remarks about my continually running to the Press are untrue.

*Mr Speaker:* Order! The hon. member is now named. He will resume his seat...[He was then formally 'named' to the House and the Premier, who felt that the Speaker had been 'very tolerant' and gave Bennett the chance to apologise to the chair and the House]

*Mr Bennett:* Mr Speaker, I believe that you used your position this morning to conduct a personal attack on me. Your remark about my continually running to the Press is untrue.

*Mr Speaker:* Order! The hon. member has denied that he runs to the Press. I accept his denial, but I will not tolerate his constant disorderly conduct in this Chamber. This morning was the breaking point so far as I am concerned.

*Hon. G. F. R. Nicklin:* If the hon. member for South Brisbane is not prepared to do the proper thing, I have no alternative but to move—‘That the hon. member for South Brisbane be suspended from the service of the House until Tuesday next’.

*Question put*—and the House divided—40 to 23 in favour.

At one level, such incidents were minor skirmishes fought over sensitive issues, when the Parliament did not want to raise the larger issues. They appear as trivial if not petty reflections of relations between both sides of the House. In this particular case, the Speaker (rather than affected ministers) was prepared to take up the attack on Bennett after the inquiry had run out of steam. Then once challenged, the government resorted to its ‘sufficient numbers’ to have matters always determined in its favour. There were others even among the Labor side who believed that Bennett sprayed mud around too freely, and that as a barrister he would occasionally attempt to get thrown out when he had to go up town to his legal practice or attend an important court case in which he was appearing (like many other parliamentarians, Bennett continued his professional business while a Member of Parliament). Such stories are, however, often apocryphal, as Bennett was not often really thrown out. Whatever the motivation, though, such behaviour was not uncommon in the Assembly. Bennett also distinguished himself with his fists on occasions, such as when in December 1963 he punched Greg Kehoe (a former Labor member and defector to the QLP) in the mouth, breaking a tooth and splitting his lip! Kehoe broke a finger trying to retaliate.

## **The Mount Isa Mines industrial dispute and the Parliament**

In 1964–65, a bitter and protracted industrial dispute began at Mount Isa Mines between the company and the local members of the Australian Workers’ Union (AWU, called the ‘Committee for Management Control’) plus other unions of the Trades and Labour Council (TLC). In many ways, the dispute was a consequence of the tightening of the *Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1961* by Deputy Premier, Ken Morris, which prevented the commission from awarding increased prosperity loadings through the tribunal. Unions felt this provision was ‘unjust’, especially as the company refused to negotiate over bonus payments. There were also suggestions that the government and the company

were in cahoots over the strategy to take on the union. Once the dispute flared, inter-union rivalry became an additional feature of the dispute. The AWU was recognised as the main union at the site but its state leadership did not reflect local sentiment and its virtual monopoly position was challenged by (left-wing) craft unions associated with the TLC. The strike/lockout was led on the ground by Pat Mackie, a breakaway leader of the local AWU who was dismissed by the company during the dispute and later became an outcast from his union.

The magnitude of the Mount Isa dispute illustrated that the institution of parliament was not a good forum in which to deal with wider societal or economic crises. It was difficult to use an adversarial parliament in either a deliberative or a consensual capacity—and as the government of the day found passing tougher legislation was technically possible but it did not necessarily resolve the conflict. The Mount Isa dispute, though, became a celebrated case, and for years after became a favourite topic of parliamentary debate, providing ample ammunition to both sides of the Chamber for the apportionment of blame. The fact that the government sided with the company (and subsequently the official AWU; see below) throughout the dispute was divisive and tensions were exacerbated after Nicklin authorised the use of police to quell any disturbance in Mount Isa. In retrospect, however, perhaps more serious was the government's persistent inactivity and preparedness to allow the dispute to run on and fester.

Premier Nicklin was reportedly ill and in hospital during part of the dispute (*Courier-Mail*, 9 February 1965), leaving the Treasurer, Tom Hiley, as Acting Premier. When the Parliament resumed in March 1965, the government faced a want-of-confidence motion from the opposition, introduced because it was critical of the government's handling of the Mount Isa dispute. Jack Duggan outlined seven grounds for the motion: that the economy was adversely affected; hardship and suffering were occurring; the government's actions were inept; the Parliament had not been reconvened early to debate the matter; emergency powers issued under Orders in Council were aggravating the dispute; the statutory limitations imposed on bonus payments by the 1961 act were counterproductive; and 'disquiet' existed over the use of police to intervene in the town (*QPD* 1965:vol. 240, pp. 2309–10). This was one of the longest debates in one sitting day, beginning at 11.37 am on Thursday 4 March and lasting until 3.50 am the next day (although the final result was never in doubt and was lost 38–22 on party lines). Nicklin amended the want-of-confidence motion to negate directly its intent (contrary to conventional debating rules and UK parliamentary procedure set out in *Erskine May*, but not prohibited under *Standing Orders*). Nicklin's amendment expressed the House's confidence in the government over its actions throughout the dispute. Interestingly, although Duggan challenged this tactic on the floor, he was overruled by the Speaker, who felt 'it places before the House two alternative propositions' (*QPD* 1965:vol.

240, p. 2336)—a novel interpretation of debating practice. While eventually the want-of-confidence motion was defeated and Nicklin's amendment was successful, the debate placed the government under scrutiny and indicated increased vigour from the opposition.

The government's response to the Mount Isa dispute was announced a little more than one week later, on St Patrick's Day. The Premier, however, in proposing amendments to industrial law to outlaw picketing (see Chapter 5), made a surprising speech to the Parliament. Introducing the legislative amendments in the first reading stage on 17 March 1965 (*QPD* 1965:vol. 240, pp. 2640–1), the Premier argued to the effect that

[i]t is true that the genesis of the Mount Isa dispute may have been industrial in that it was detonated by a refusal on the part of the Industrial Commission in August last to increase the rates of pay provided under the Mount Isa Mines Award...Let us for just one moment take the situation for what [it] is today, namely, a bitter, vicious, and unscrupulous attempt by the Queensland Trades and Labour Council to eliminate the Australian Workers' Union from the Mount Isa mining field. This is obviously the first step in a considered and planned campaign to decimate this great union.

The government chose to adopt the tactics of 'divide and rule' by supporting the moderate AWU leadership against rank-and-file activists they regarded as communists. The Premier went on to speculate:

By whom has this campaign been considered and planned...Its most vociferous proponents are either self-professed Communists or those who, without professing, associate with Communists. Its most active leader [referring to Pat Mackie] has a long and varied record of criminal convictions in various countries, which establish him as a nomadic thief, swindler, dope-pedlar, gangster, and gunman. (*QPD* 1965:vol. 240, pp. 2640–1)

The opposition had difficulty responding to the government's actions and, being split into different industrial factions, even had trouble expressing a coherent case out of fraternal solidarity with the unions concerned. Labor had introduced similar emergency (anti-picketing) powers legislation when Premier Ned Hanlon had broken the railways strike of 1948. Jack Duggan was left to criticise the government for its inaction and for its unwillingness to convene conciliation conferences or have discussions with the protagonists. A succession of other Labor speakers (including Eric Lloyd, Fred Newton, Pat Hanlon, Doug Sherrington and Alex James Inch—the local member who was ineffective during the dispute) criticised the government for being 'smugly complacent' and not

being prepared to resolve the dispute. The QLP's Les Diplock supported the government's anti-picketing legislation, yet similarly bemoaned the previous inactivity of the ministry—even going so far as to state that the government's own tolerance had left it open to criticism of being initially hardline but then walking away from the dispute.

Treasurer Hiley responded by stating that the opposition's points appeared spurious and hypocritical. Hiley reminded them:

[I]f one stays in this Chamber long enough one frequently encounters instances of where other times produce other views, but I must confess that never in all my long period in this Parliament have I heard such a tirade of abuse by the Opposition against the decisions and the legislation of a Labour Government of less than 20 years ago, legislation which today they describe as inept, hill-billy and useless but for which, less than 20 years ago, several of the present members of the Opposition voted. Today, by this clear inversion of mental process, we hear a presentation reeking with class hatred, studded with personal abuse and producing what I am sure the historians of this Parliament will put down on record as one of Parliament's less-than-good days. (*QPD* 1965:vol. 240, p. 2658)

Overall the government did not emerge from the Mount Isa dispute unscathed. Criticisms of their performance went far wider than the parliamentary opposition. Press reaction, while slow to see the significance of the dispute, tended to hold the government responsible both for the cause of the dispute (the restrictive legislation) and the lack of leadership shown to resolve the issue. The *Truth* (14 February 1965), for example, reported a *Sydney Morning Herald* assessment that claimed the cabinet had shown 'administrative ineptitude' and had mismanaged the dispute by 'wretched inaction'. Later, the *Truth* (28 February 1965) argued that 'even influential men very close to the government feel that there are too many in Cabinet with too little experience' to deal with complex industrial disputes. It reported that fellow conservatives in the Liberal and Country Parties were saying 'a farmer-dominated government such as we have in Queensland is not equipped for big industrial strife' (*Truth*, 28 February 1965).

## Ferocious politicking over three-cornered contests

Increasingly frustrated and gradually emboldened, the Liberal Party initiated challenges to the dominance of the Country Party in the Coalition. Certainly few, if any, Liberals considered that they could ever govern alone, but an increasing

proportion of the rank-and-file membership began in the mid-1960s to feel that some redress in parliamentary representation was overdue. The Liberals had been traditionally well represented in the ministry (five Liberals to six Country Party, then six to seven more recently) and few had complaints over the portfolio areas they were allocated. They were, however, disgruntled over two issues: the number of seats they achieved relative to their state vote and the prospect of being corralled entirely into the geographic region of the south-east.

Other political incidents hardened their resolve from time to time. When the long-serving MLA Alf Muller (Fassifern) rejoined the Country Party in September 1965, the Liberals opposed his return to their Coalition partner. Muller had spent almost three years as a conservative-leaning independent after his demotion from Nicklin's second cabinet and subsequent falling out with the party. Liberals attacked the Country Party's decision to allow Muller to rejoin, while the Country Party responded by attacking the Liberals for daring to propose that challengers from the junior partner could depose sitting members of the senior party. In the Parliament, some ardent breakaway Liberal backbenchers proposed on two separate occasions (in 1963 and again in 1966) that the members of the two Coalition parties should sit apart in the Legislative Assembly. The backbenchers were concerned that the Liberals should develop a separate parliamentary profile so as to be able to pursue issues of particular concern to them. On both occasions, a secret ballot was held by the joint Coalition party room, which duly rejected these moves (*Courier-Mail*, 30 June 1966).

Until 1964, a status quo arrangement between the Country and Liberal Parties had existed. This arrangement (or rather understanding) committed both parties to agree between themselves before every election which seats each would contest. Underlying this arrangement was an understanding that each party had established seat 'rights' and that the other Coalition partner should not normally challenge sitting members. This arrangement, however, worked to the advantage of the Country Party because historically it was the larger party with a stronger state-wide organisation. Gradually, however, this electoral arrangement came under criticism from the organisational arm of the Liberal Party, which began to dismiss notions that a formal arrangement had ever been agreed (*Sunday Mail*, 17 October 1965). In order to break out of this electoral straitjacket the Liberals found themselves in, they were prepared to initiate 'three-cornered contests' in which the Coalition parties stood against each other as well as against Labor. As Hughes (1969:16) points out, 'three-cornered' contests were something of a misnomer as almost invariably the DLP contested the seats in question in addition to the other three. By initiating these contests,

however, the Liberals ignited the ire not only of the Country Party organisation but of senior Liberals in government. The split was not simply party against party; it also divided the Liberals on tactics.

Generally the unrest within the Coalition was presented in the press as a ‘punch-up’ caused by inter-party ‘feuding’. The rift was regarded as somewhat senseless and likely to lead to further disunity that would undermine the government’s support (for example, *Truth*, 20 September 1964). There was little regular media support for the justification of the separatist or ultra-Liberals’ claims, or that some renegotiation of the Coalition was appropriate. Rather, those Liberals seeking a better deal were presented as either naive or malicious troublemakers who were unsettling good government. In retrospect, it is remarkable how little criticism the Country Party attracted even though it adopted a most intractable stance throughout the dispute. One report, in 1964, quoted a former parliamentarian as saying that the Coalition government was ‘beginning to come apart at the seams. After the last election it looked as if it could stay in power for 50 years. But now I’m not so sure. [Labor leader] Jack Duggan could find himself Premier one day’ (*Truth*, 20 September 1964).

Leaders of the Country Party rarely justified their ruthless stance, but rather emphasised the damage to Coalition unity and the threat to the government’s survival. John Ahern, as President of the Country Party, argued that Liberal-inspired three-cornered contests ‘must lead to unnecessary bitterness’ (*Courier-Mail*, 3 April 1965). Later, Ahern argued that the breakaway Liberal Party executive was ‘prepared to ignore the welfare of Queensland in its grasp for power’ (*Courier-Mail*, 21 June 1965). Then, as the Liberals began selecting candidates to challenge sitting members, Ahern slammed the Liberal Party’s organisation, saying that they were becoming ‘lost in their wishful dreams of power’ (*Courier-Mail*, 29 September 1965). Other coalitionists tried to restrict challenges to seats where there was less at stake—where there was a natural vacancy in Coalition seats or where neither side had a current sitting member (namely, seats with Labor, DLP or independent members). There were also widespread rumours about this time that the Country Party with the support of the ALP would reintroduce first-past-the-post voting to quash the Liberals’ momentum.

Young Liberals in particular were anxious to exert their influence. They attacked those complacent Liberal members who tended to accept the party’s subordinate status, calling them ‘benchwarmers’ and part-time members who were more interested in their private businesses and in other ‘trivial duties’ such as ‘afternoon tea parties and garden parties’ (*Courier-Mail*, 24 February 1965). At their 1965 annual conference (attended by about 200 participants), the Young Liberals unanimously adopted a resolution favouring three-cornered contests at forthcoming elections (*Sunday Mail*, 2 May 1965). The Young

Liberals also criticised Nicklin for placing the Country Party's political fortunes ahead of the government's fate. Others within the Liberal organisation and on the backbench (such as John Murray, Clayfield) were supportive of a greater presence for the party. The state president, Senator Robert 'Bob' Sherrington, was described as the 'arch advocate for extending Liberal influence into CP held areas. He preached the creed that the Liberals should not be content to remain as the minority party' (*Truth*, 23 March 1966). Along with the state executive (and especially the state secretary, Charles Porter), Sherrington argued that the Liberals had to become a state-wide party. The Lands Minister, Alan Fletcher, described his words as 'those of not an ally but an opponent' (*AJPH* 1966:vol. 12, no. 3, p. 3).

In 1964, in anticipation of the next senate election, many Liberals sought to end the practice of running a joint Coalition team (favouring the Country Party, who were first on the ticket) and instead fielding a separate ticket of purely Liberal candidates. With five senate positions available, the issue revolved around whether the Liberals could force the Country Party into a lower place on the joint ticket or do better by running separately hoping to get two senators elected in their own right. The Liberals sought to have the Country Party relegated to the number-three position on the ticket (the most vulnerable) and pay a higher proportion of the campaign costs than the customary one-third (*Courier-Mail*, 17 August 1964). After some intense negotiations, the Coalition agreed to retain the joint ticket with the Country Party agreeing to accept the second position and pay half the costs.

If Young Liberals, backbenchers and the organisational 'heavies' were the 'young turks', the older, senior parliamentary Liberals tended to be more circumspect. Sam Ramsden (Lib., Merthyr), who had been in parliament since 1957, was a strong supporter of the Coalition and publicly defended the government's unity and record. Others warned that 'some of the seats we hold in rural areas such as Bowen, Rockhampton and Toowoomba East are gone if the Country Party retaliates' (*Truth*, 27 June 1965). Coalition loyalists pointed out that when the decision to reintroduce preferential voting was taken, the Liberals had promised the Country Party that they would not initiate three-cornered contests—and that doing so in 1965–66 was 'one of the greatest political double-crosses in Queensland history' (*Truth*, 27 June 1965).

Senior Liberal ministers enjoying positions of influence in the cabinet (such as Munro, Hiley, Chalk and Delamothe) came to be regarded as part of the 'establishment' by the ultra-Liberals (*Courier-Mail*, 21 March 1964). The Transport Minister, Gordon Chalk, was reluctant to support the breakaway Liberals overtly and discouraged the formation of Liberal branches in rural areas. His stance was due partly to his close relations with Country Party ministers in cabinet and partly because he usually relied on Country Party organisational

support in his semi-rural seat of Lockyer (a seat he held for 26 years, but which the National Party eventually captured in 1980 after Chalk's intended successor, Liberal Tony Bourke, was beaten by Tony FitzGerald).<sup>3</sup> Chalk was, however, fighting on two fronts. He was interested in putting the case strongly for loyalty and 'Liberal unity' to keep the party together and in coalition, while in the meantime he was confronted with backbenchers who were beginning to question his own loyalty to the Liberal cause. In 1963, he had already been warned that if he continued to refuse to assist with the establishment of Liberal branches outside the metropolitan area, he faced expulsion from the party (*Courier-Mail*, 7 August 1963). Breaking with tradition, Chalk then found himself challenged for the deputy leadership in January 1965 and then for the leader's position in December 1965 when Hiley stood down. On both occasions, his challenger was Alex Dewar, representing the 'ultras' in the party (and both times Chalk managed to win only by narrow margins). Later, similar attacks were made against the Liberal Attorney-General, Peter Delamothe, after he campaigned in 1965 for the Country Party's David Nicholson in the lead-up to the 1966 state election; previously, too, the Country Party had attempted to revamp its branches in Delamothe's Liberal seat of Bowen. Delamothe's sin was to have shared a platform with Nicholson—and to speak with courage and passion against the prospect of three-cornered contests. Criticism of Delamothe became intense and personal, such that he was obliged to threaten to sue other members of his party for defamation. There is also some evidence that the attacks on Delamothe in 1965 were part of a wider struggle for the position of deputy Liberal leader after Chalk became leader, and that the attempt to denigrate Delamothe was designed to dissuade him from nominating for the position.

Politicians outside the state also issued warnings about Coalition disunity in Queensland. The Deputy Prime Minister, Jack McEwen (Country Party), told the Queensland Coalition in 1965 that three-cornered contests 'could have disastrous results' and that 'moves for the contests were related to promoting party or person above the state or the issues'. McEwen added that 'there could be no amicable relationship between the parties in a situation where the Premier was defending a sitting member and the Deputy Premier was trying to unseat him' (*Courier-Mail*, 5 July 1965). This argument assumed that members facing challenge would be from the over-represented Country Party and that only Liberals were to blame for the prevailing political infighting. Against McEwen, Harold Holt, the federal Liberal Treasurer, told Queensland Liberals that they should not 'surrender to any political party' because they had an 'obligation to carry the Liberal story to every part of Australia' (*Courier-Mail*, 26 June 1965).

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<sup>3</sup> Lockyer was an unusual seat, in that it had a Liberal member in a rural seat, in which strong Country Party branches existed. The dynamics of campaigning in Lockyer were thus different to other Liberal metropolitan or provincial seats.

Holt also maintained that the Liberal Party had a broader base than the other parties and was the only party 'which could fairly claim to be representative of all sections of the Australian public' (*Courier-Mail*, 26 June 1965).

The criteria decided on by the Liberals in selecting which additional seats to contest were simple. First, they would challenge if both organisations could claim an interest in the seat (for instance, because of previous levels of support, anticipated gains or changing electoral compositions). Second, a Liberal candidate would be fielded if the presence of an alternative non-Labor candidate could tip the balance in seats where previously a single Country Party candidate had been unable to defeat an ALP member (and in such cases the intention was that the Liberal would finish ahead of the Country Party candidate). Although spoiling for a fight, the Liberals still pledged to allocate preferences to the Country Party in all cases where three-cornered contests were waged (*Courier-Mail*, 3 April 1965). Such criteria led the Liberals to consider up to 10–12 additional seats for possible contest against the Country Party's sitting members or candidates. At the 1966 elections, Coalition candidates were engaged in three-way challenges in eight seats (five in the south-east corner: Albert, South Coast, Logan, Redcliffe and Murrumba; and three in provincial towns: Cairns, Toowoomba East and Port Curtis [Gladstone]), although none of the sitting members was unseated (see further details below).

Some of the momentum was taken out of the ultra-Liberals' challenge with the sudden death of Senator Bob Sherrington in March 1966. Indeed, the *Truth* (20 March 1966) noted that his passing 'could not have come at a worse time for the Liberals. The big State political game was just about to begin in earnest when the Liberals lost their captain.' Chalk also put his leadership on the line in March 1966 over the issue of Coalition unity. He suggested to the Liberal organisation that he would surrender his position if the party refused to allow him to fight the forthcoming state election alongside Premier Nicklin, delivering a 'joint-party' platform. As indicated below, this strategy was designed to take the heat out of the discord caused by three-cornered contests.

The three-cornered issue also became a catalyst for the emergence of an inner Liberal Party group known as the 'ginger group' (beginning about 1965–66 and surviving until the early 1980s). The name came from an address given by the state secretary, Charles Porter, to a Young Liberal convention in Rockhampton in which he was critical of the party's obsequiousness within the Coalition. Porter went on to say: 'every party needs a ginger group and you are that group' (*Courier-Mail*, 31 January 1966; but see his own accounts in Porter 1981:38–9, 46–7). The Liberal 'gingers' tended to be 'ultras' more interested in maintaining a separate identity for the party, extending the party's influence and fighting for small-'l' liberal issues. In 1966, they also opposed the right of the party leader to select the Liberal ministry, fearing such power could be used to discipline or

compromise their faction (or other dissidents). The members of the faction were largely state parliamentarians and wider support among the party for the ‘ginger group’ tended to wax and wane over time. Interestingly, given the attention this group has since received, they did not meet as a regular faction and indeed, according to one member, Bill Hewitt, never held formal meetings as such—a point also confirmed by Porter. Rather, common interests and the physical overcrowding of the old Parliament House threw the group together (six Liberal members, for example, shared a single office). The members of the parliamentary ‘ginger group’ included William Lickiss, John Murray, Geoffrey Chinchin, Clive Hughes, Charles Porter, Bill Hewitt and Arthur Crawford after 1969; others in the organisational wing included the president, Dr Arthur Hartwig, and Young Liberal leader, Keith Livingstone. Hartwig had little time for the Country Party and claimed that ‘to believe that all parties which are against the Labor Party are pro-Liberal is to delude ourselves’ (*Courier-Mail*, 26 March 1966). He was later suspended from his position of state president (and subsequently defeated in a ballot) after he indicated he would support the local ‘liberal’ candidate in the seat of Landsborough when Frank Nicklin retired (despite the Liberal executive deciding not to run a candidate). Although the ‘ginger’ faction was not solely concerned with three-cornered contests, this issue became symbolic for them as an assertion of the party’s identity and standing (*AJPH* 1967:vol. 13, no. 2, p. 266, and 1968:vol. 14, no. 3. p. 429).

## The 1966 election: expected to be a ‘lively’ show

One of the more interesting aspects of the 1966 election campaign was that the *Courier-Mail* predicted the date of the election (28 May) as early as 22 November 1965. This could indicate either that the *Courier-Mail* was very good at guessing from among possible dates or that political journalists were taken into the Premier’s confidence some five months before the set date. It also indicates that state politics were far more predictable and routine so that elections could be set with such precision so far into the future. Hughes records that the 1966 election was fought on the same electoral arrangements as those operating in 1963. There had been no redistribution and no further amendments to electoral laws or weighting mechanisms. Indeed, Hughes observed that the sole change in electoral matters between 1963 and 1966 was that pubs were now permitted to remain open during polling hours (Hughes 1969:15).

For the first time since the conservatives had regained government in 1957, the Coalition made a ‘joint policy’ speech to launch their campaign. The ‘joint’ policy was, however, delivered in two parts and presented separately by the

two leaders: Nicklin on 9 May at the Star Theatre in Maroochydore, and Chalk at the Albert Hall in Brisbane on 12 May. Both leaders had agreed to present policy details in their combined speech as a way of patching up differences. The idea of a joint launch was initiated largely by Gordon Chalk, who in his first presentation as leader sought to make a symbolic pretence at unity. Much was made in the Liberal Party and in the media about the fact that this was Chalk's 'maiden' policy launch. Confirmation of the commitment by the Liberals to stage a 'joint' launch was made late in the piece at their annual convention in Brisbane in March 1966. They agreed 'unanimously' to the proposition (or more accurately ultimatum) put forward by the leader, Chalk (despite delegates earlier attempting to amend the motion in favour of a separate speech). At the convention, Chalk delivered a 'fighting speech' in support of the joint policy launch, informing delegates that Nicklin had already agreed to the proposal if Chalk could sell the idea to his party. Many Liberal Party members had serious reservations and did not believe this strategy to be in the best interests of the party in the longer term. They felt that a joint launch would be a public symbol of their subservience and that it would be more difficult to maintain their own identity and policy orientations. Those with this view were soon provided with ample justification for distrusting their senior Coalition partner. When the campaign proper began, press reports carried the allegation that Nicklin had taken part in a 'secret' television program to be broadcast on all channels to kick-off the election, with the intention of pre-empting both the Labor and Liberal policy initiatives.

To add further insult to injury, the Country Party refused to offer an official party-to-party exchange of preferences with the Liberals. Well into the campaign proper (on 7 May), the Country Party informed the Liberals that it would not agree to an entire exchange of preferences. The Liberals had earlier declared their intention of allocating second preferences to their coalition partner, but the Country Party headquarters (conscious of local branch antagonism) was more cautious. They decided that responsibility for deciding preference allocations would rest with local Country Party branches where three-cornered contests were being held. This allowed local branches some discretion over preferences where a range of candidates was standing (especially if other conservative independents had nominated or the respective Liberal candidate was considered objectionable). In one case, press reports claimed that a Country Party candidate would encourage his voters to place the ALP second in exchange for ALP preferences (*Courier-Mail*, 22 April 1966). The Liberals were offended by this snub and regarded it as a further sign of Country Party ruthlessness. One spokesperson for the Liberals said 'from the viewpoint of ensuring a return of the Country–Liberal coalition the Country Party is being very foolish if it does not exchange preferences with Liberal candidates' (*Truth*, 8 May 1966).

In consideration of his age and failing health, Nicklin proposed to shorten the real campaign to three weeks—from the date of the Country Party's launch to the day of the election. Commentators had been expecting a lively campaign but such a short, 'hard-hitting' campaign was considered likely to maximise political advantage to the government. Yet within that time Nicklin attended three Brisbane speeches or rallies and visited 12 provincial towns in 17 days. Unlike earlier campaigns, he chose mainly to fly across the state rather than consume time in rail travel. Following tradition, he launched the government's campaign in his own electorate of Landsborough at Maroochydore but went on to deliver addresses in Redcliffe and in Cleveland, located then in Logan (two outer Brisbane seats in which the Country Party was engaged in three-cornered contests). Nicklin considered his main achievement was to have delivered 'stable and progressive government for all sections of the community' (*Courier-Mail*, 10 May 1966). He also announced that under his leadership the Coalition had brought government closer to the people, and he was especially proud of the fact that in the past three years, 22 cabinet meetings had been held in provincial towns. Five days before the poll was conducted, Nicklin announced to the state that he would definitely retire from the premiership before the next Parliament was dissolved, naming his deputy, Jack Pizzey, as his automatic successor. To modern political observers, such behaviour within the context of an election campaign could seem incomprehensible. Yet Nicklin was able to make the announcement appear as an indication of continuing strength under Country Party rule.

Together, the Coalition stood 81 candidates for the 78-seat Assembly—an increase in candidates of eight from 1963. The Country Party stood 36 candidates (one of whom secured an uncontested seat) and the Liberals stood 45—the largest number of seats they had challenged in their history. As such, the prospect of three-cornered contests increased to eight, with sitting Country Party members challenged in five south-eastern seats: Albert, Logan, Redcliffe, South Coast and Murrumba (the seat of the Speaker, David Nicholson). Three-way contests also took place in three safe Labor seats in provincial towns—namely: Cairns, Toowoomba East and Port Curtis.

Nicklin was privately and publicly worried that opposition to the Vietnam War would have 'an unforeseen' effect on the state election—perhaps tainting incumbents or linking the Queensland Coalition government with the Holt–McEwen Coalition government in Canberra. A long list of specific parish-pump promises was forthcoming from Nicklin to counter any prospect of political disenchantment. He promised quicker processes to transfer leasehold land to freehold, simplified timber valuations, increased availability of land for pastoralists and an improved drought relief scheme (assisting water storage and fodder carriage). The sugar and dairy industries were singled out for special

state assistance (especially given that some ‘sugar seats’ such as Mirani and Whitsunday were held by Country Party members on slim margins). Other old favourites such as more police officers, more police promotions and improved public service superannuation were offered to the electorate. Education scholarships would be expanded, together with a \$200 per annum grant for remote country school students and a ‘living-away-from-home’ allowance of \$4 a week for schoolchildren who had to board. Many of his promises were detailed and specific, sometimes down to the actual number of land lots to be released for public auction from particular land development schemes.

Gordon Chalk, in presenting the Liberals’ part of the joint speech, offered more aid to independent schools, along with increased grants, subsidies and concessions for all school students. He promised to build new institutes of technology at Toowoomba and Rockhampton and new teachers’ colleges in Brisbane and Townsville. The Liberals sought to give inducements to apprentices undergoing training and provide increased industrial land around provincial cities to spur industrial development. Housing and roads were key issues for Treasurer Chalk, with incentives offered to home-buyers and funding set aside for the first stage of Brisbane’s Riverside Expressway north of Victoria Bridge. He was also prepared to reinvestigate the feasibility of the Burdekin Dam project and provide greater funds for the Agricultural Bank to on-loan. The Liberals were also keen to undertake another migrant recruitment drive in the United Kingdom.

The QLP, by now a waning electoral force, still delivered an impressive array of policy proposals to the electorate. They promised to establish a judicial tribunal to reconstruct the basic wage, arguing that because of price increases workers should have greater entitlement to a share of profits. The QLP committed itself to increase Housing Commission loans, provide marriage loans to young couples, continue to support state aid to non-government schools and assist small farmers through a range of initiatives. The QLP leader, Leslie Diplock (Aubigny), the sole QLP member in parliament, still spent a good portion of his electoral speech criticising the opposition Labor Party while dismissing the government as ‘confused and frustrated by an internal power struggle’ (*Courier-Mail*, 12 May 1966). The QLP still managed, however, to stand 58 candidates for the Legislative Assembly—only two down from the previous election—but almost all were political novices.

The Opposition Leader, Jack Duggan, declared that Labor would fight the 1966 election on three principal issues: the expansion of the sugar industry; irrigation; and outright opposition to large-scale transfer of freehold title to rural land. These were no doubt worthy issues, and important to certain specific interests, but hardly the type of issues to capture a popular mood or marshal any resentment against the longstanding government. Duggan delivered his policy

speech on 4 May (to 1000 supporters at Brisbane's City Hall) and followed this with a rural policy launch at the Vogue Theatre, Nambour, on 5 May. Labor's campaign was based on the slogan that it was time for a change, with their most prominent promise to provide free school textbooks to students in state and non-state schools. Labor again clung to the salvation of price controls backed by stricter standard controls for commodities. Improved employment conditions were envisaged (including increased long-service leave, equal pay for equal work and the basic wage indexed to the consumer price index). Duggan promised to amend the *Public Service Act* to allow women to remain in employment after marriage. Specific policies for culture, youth affairs and sport were announced—as were plans to electrify Brisbane's rail system. For rural Queensland, Labor offered aid for the sugar industry (subject to highly regulated market arrangements) and wider access to land through the preservation of leasehold provisions. Against the government's developmentalist propaganda, Duggan argued that Queensland had experienced the second-lowest population growth in Australia, the highest increase in the cost of living and high increases in state taxation.

Labor stood candidates in 76 of the 78 electorates and, according to their party president, B. R. Milliner, 'the ALP regarded all other parties as being the Opposition and opposed to the principles of the ALP' (*Courier-Mail*, 22 April 1966). Duggan made much in the campaign about how the 'gerrymander' disadvantaged Labor and about the malapportionment between the parties in terms of the votes received and the seats gained. He also promised to abolish preferential voting (to remove a perceived advantage to the Coalition) and lower the voting age to eighteen to give young people the right to participate in selecting their representatives.

Labor was, however, also hard on its own candidates who did not toe the party line. Bill Baxter (Hawthorne and formerly a deputy opposition whip, but no great performer in the Parliament) was dis-endorsed before the 1966 election, ostensibly because he did not stand by party decisions and had been rude or 'rather brusque' to women party members (*Sunday Mail*, 1 May 1966). The victim of factional infighting, Baxter fell foul of the 'powers that be', but did not take his dis-endorsement lying down. Moments before official nominations for the seat closed with the Electoral Commission, he nominated himself as an independent. Under party rules, he was automatically expelled from the ALP by standing against an officially endorsed candidate: T. Burton, from the Printing Industry Employees' Union. Baxter, as the sitting member, was defeated miserably in 1966, gaining only 1546 votes from the 11 361 Hawthorne electors. The Liberals' Bill Kaus won the seat. Trailing Burton on the primary vote, Kaus was able to claim victory by securing the DLP preferences and more than half of Baxter's renegade vote. Baxter did not contest a seat again.

The results of the 1966 election were virtually identical to the 1963 outcome. Against the national backdrop of the Vietnam War, continued arrests at protests, the visit by US President L. B. Johnson and the looming federal election, the result was remarkable. Each of the parties secured exactly the same number of seats as before. Labor won 26 seats from 350 254 votes across the state (43.84 per cent), the Country Party won 27 from 154 081 votes (19.28 per cent) and the Liberals, with 203 648 votes (25.49 per cent), managed 20 seats. Together, the Coalition recorded a vote of 44.68 per cent—only 0.84 per cent ahead of Labor. From the total electorate of 798 973, the combined Coalition vote was only 7475 more than the ALP vote, yet the Coalition held 47 seats compared with Labor's 26.

In the three-way contests, all five Country Party members held their seats. Three were reliant on Liberal preferences to get over the line: in Redcliffe, the popular Jim Houghton held off against a poor Liberal showing; Nicholson retained Murrumba by 999 votes on Liberal preferences; and in Logan, Ernest Wood, a one-timer, won by 700 votes on Liberal preferences. In two Country Party electorates, the Liberals mounted a serious challenge, coming second on the ballot. In Albert, the Country Party sitting member, Cecil Carey, hung on by only 49 votes against his Liberal challenger, E. Harley (5566 votes to 5517), while in South Coast, the new Country Party candidate (and former Chairman of Albert Shire), Russ Hinze, defeated the Liberal candidate, H. Winders, by 6175 to 5598 votes. Hinze did not win the seat on the primary vote (indeed, he was almost 1000 votes behind on first preferences) but claimed the prize only after taking 80 per cent of Labor preferences from the third candidate (gaining 2178 preferences out of a total of 2702). Hinze later went on to become one of the stalwarts of the Bjelke-Petersen ministry after 1974. The fact that Hinze had initially won his seat on Labor preferences did not prevent him from being a strident adversary of Labor in the House—even if some opposition members were later to describe him as a likeable 'old bastard' and a 'real larrikin with a down-to-earth wit and an unconventional approach to Government matters' (*QPD* 1991:vol. 319, pp. 6–7). He reserved most of his hatred for the reforming Liberals who continued running challenges against him, at one time describing them as 'mongrels'. Hinze had also made 'dark threats' suggesting that Country Party candidates could well have reason to allocate their preferences to the QLP ahead of the Liberals, if the Liberals continued to seek to stand in Country Party-held seats (*AJPH* 1966:vol. 12, no. 3, p. 444).

The DLP (ex-QLP) won one seat, recording the lowest level of support since its formation in 1957, with only 49 948 votes state-wide (6.25 per cent). The party's leader, Les Diplock, comfortably held the seat of Aubigny (based around Dalby) against both ALP and Country Party adversaries (taking the seat on the primary vote, securing 56.29 per cent). Four independents made up the complement of

the Assembly. Ted Walsh held Bundaberg against the ALP; Tom Aikens retained Townsville South with a generous margin; Arthur Coburn defeated Liberal and Labor challengers in Burdekin; and Herbert ‘Bunny’ Adair (an ex-QLPer) retained his seat of Cook against a spirited challenge from the ALP’s J. Bethel.

In 1966, however, the Country Party secured its second-lowest state-wide vote since it formed government—again sitting on just more than 19 per cent. In the four elections since the Coalition came to government in 1957, the party’s vote had slipped back rather than increased (19.99 per cent in 1957 to 19.5 per cent in 1960, then 19.03 per cent in 1963 and 19.28 per cent in 1966). This result represented an electoral nadir to which they would never again descend, even in the major electoral collapse of 1989 when the party managed a respectable 24 per cent. So, in 1966, less than one in five electors was casting a positive vote for the senior party of the government—and this was looming as a dangerous problem not because Labor was threatening from across the party divide, but because the Liberals were consistently outpolling the Country Party, and often by considerable margins (in 1957 by 3 per cent, in 1960 by 4.5 per cent, in 1963 by 5 per cent and in 1966 by their largest margin, 7 per cent). The slow attrition in the proportion of the state vote captured by the Country Party was a constant concern to both the parliamentary and organisational leaders of the party. This rebuff also served to convince Nicklin that he should consider handing over to another leader well before the next election to ensure stability and improve the primary vote for the Country Party. Although Nicklin’s period in government is regarded as a successful political period for the Country Party, their vote was declining precariously under the ‘gentleman premier’. It was not until a new leader was firmly in place that the Country Party vote picked up. Thereafter the Country/National Party vote gradually increased (or plateaued at new levels) through to 1989.

## Nicklin’s final ministry

Nicklin’s fourth and last ministry was sworn in on 10 June 1966 and ran for 18 months until his resignation as Premier on 17 January 1968. The size of the ministry was retained at 13—split again in favour of the Country Party by seven to six. All incumbent ministers who fought the election were reappointed and maintained in their existing portfolio areas. There was remarkable stability about the ministry with three surviving from the 1957 change of government (Nicklin, Pizzey and Chalk, the first two of whom had also remained in the same portfolio since coming to government) and a further four having continuous service from the period of the second ministry (1960–63). The other six ministers were all retained from the previous ministry (1963–66) with many remaining in their

existing portfolios. Altogether the fourth Nicklin ministry could collectively boast 55 years of experience or an average of 4.25 years per minister. Continuity and seniority were prized qualities on the frontbench of the Coalition.

Furthermore, the allocation of portfolio areas between the two Coalition partners remained unchanged. Each side continued to 'own' areas of responsibility closest to their interest base of political concerns. The Country Party retained Education, Lands, Primary Industries, Local Government, Works and Housing and Mines and Main Roads—in short, the visible portfolios in which ministerial pork-barrelling was prominent and influential clientele could be looked after. There was no attempt to swap portfolio areas or give the Liberals a chance to make a name for themselves in these instrumental/material departments. The six Liberals were consigned to the invisible or 'bad news' areas such as Treasury, Justice, the Attorney-General's area, Industrial Development and Labour Relations. Only the Health and Transport areas allowed much scope for largesse and the latter was clouded by constant disputes over freight charges. The composition of the fourth ministry was

- Premier and Minister for State Development: Frank Nicklin, CP
- Treasurer: Gordon Chalk, Lib.
- Minister for Education: Jack Pizzey, CP
- Minister for Industrial Development: Alex Dewar, Lib.
- Minister for Lands: Alan Fletcher, CP
- Minister for Local Government and Conservation: Harold Richter, CP
- Minister for Primary Industries: John Row, CP
- Minister for Works and Housing: Johannes Bjelke-Petersen, CP
- Minister for Justice and Attorney-General: Dr Peter Delamothe, Lib.
- Minister for Health: Doug Tooth, Lib.
- Minister for Labour and Tourism: John Herbert, Lib.
- Minister for Mines and Main Roads: Ronald Camm, CP
- Minister for Transport: William Knox, Lib.

After one year, Frederick Campbell (Lib., Aspley) was added to the ministry (on 20 June 1967) to replace Alex Dewar as Minister for Industrial Development (see below). The demotion in the ranking of the Industrial Development portfolio effectively meant that the policy area was accorded lowest priority in the cabinet. This decline in emphasis was all the more noticeable given the earlier prominence the portfolio had enjoyed when occupied by Deputy Premier, Alan Munro.

Dewar resigned from the ministry in June 1967 over allegations that he had sexually harassed two girls in the Department of Labour and Tourism while

acting minister, and that he could have had conflicts of interest after investing in a tourist company (Oasis Proprietary Limited) when Minister for Industry. In the Address-in-Reply debate in August 1967, Dewar told the Assembly that the Premier and Deputy Premier had summoned him in May to request his resignation from cabinet. In his speech, Dewar evaded the issue of harassment, implying that the allegations had been made by some discontents in the department who had too little work to do. He went on to give his account of the ostensible reasons for his resignation: that the Liberal Tourism Minister, John Herbert, and the Country Party Primary Industries Minister, John Row, had refused his firm permission to establish a koala enclosure at Oasis Gardens in Sunnybank. Dewar recounted that after he indicated he would resign, the Premier agreed to issue the permit for Oasis to stock koalas—prompting Dewar to claim ‘four little koalas cost a Cabinet Minister his portfolio’ (*QPD* 1967:vol. 246, p. 308).

The Deputy Premier, Gordon Chalk, however, made an extemporaneous speech supplementing the former minister’s account and insisting that John Herbert had requested action be taken against Dewar for his behaviour while serving as acting Minister for Labour and Tourism. Chalk reported on the ‘unfortunate circumstances’:

The House has been told that the Minister for Labour and Tourism [John Herbert] was away for a period. On his return to his office certain charges were made to him by two female employees. The Minister was somewhat in doubt as to how the matter should be handled, and he came to me, as the Leader of the Liberal Party and Deputy Premier, and asked for my advice. I told him I would not be prepared to listen to charges of the nature that were made unless the persons concerned were prepared to repeat in my presence...the occurrences that were alleged...The two young ladies concerned repeated certain charges to me. They accused Mr Dewar of kissing them, and of certain other actions. I recorded these happenings, but I was not prepared to accept their evidence alone. I decided that the only way to ascertain whether these young ladies were telling the truth was to send for certain members of the staff of the department involved and question them...I interviewed three officers associated with the department. All told me stories which indicated to me that there was truth in the accusations...In the meantime, I was interviewed by a parent of one of the girls...the father was extremely concerned—in fact, he indicated thoughts about taking a certain line of action—I requested him to give the Premier and me time to discuss the charges with the hon. member for Wavell...I shall tell this House that when he was confronted with the charge of kissing these young ladies, the hon. member for Wavell admitted that he had done so. He indicated

to the Premier and me that such happenings were acts of stupidity—and I repeat the word he used, ‘stupidity’—because of his personal make-up. We all have our own peculiarities in normal life. He said that it had been an act of endearment...Further opportunity was taken by me to discuss the happening with the father of one of the girls. It was a question of whether some action would be taken by the parent or whether it could be settled without the good name not only of the girls concerned, but also the hon. member, being hurt...I discussed with the hon. member for Wavell all the problems that would confront him, his family and the Government. I indicated to him, as he has said, that I believed that in some cases there could have been some exaggeration. I do not deny that, because anyone who has been in public life knows only too well that a rolling stone gathers a heck of a lot of moss. (QPD 1967:vol. 246, pp. 314–15)

Titillating press reports further sensationalised the episode, highlighting the complaints made by the girls about Dewar ‘kissing’ them and committing ‘certain other actions’. No charges were ever laid, however, and his resignation as minister on 9 June seemed to end the matter as a public concern. Both Herbert and Dewar later made statements to the Parliament attempting to set the record straight about the koala permit, although Herbert described the koala issue as a ‘red herring’ and took the opportunity in his ministerial statement to insist that ‘the girls made allegations that Mr Dewar, whilst Acting Minister, forced his intentions upon them by kissing and other actions’ (QPD 1967:vol. 246, p. 333).

One year after his resignation from the ministry, however, Dewar went a step further and quit the government. He resigned from the Liberal Party in July 1968 to sit in the Parliament as an independent (see Chapter 7). Standing at the May 1969 state election as an independent in his north Brisbane seat of Wavell, Dewar was defeated by the official Liberal Party candidate, Dr Arthur Crawford. Dewar’s demise occurred shortly after he had emerged as a rival to Chalk and a serious contender for the Liberal leadership. There has always been some speculation that the scandal was fanned by those in government with the most to gain from his removal. Much later, after Dewar died in 1995, one of his nephews wrote that ‘it should be remembered that this occurred in a period of a power struggle between the Liberals and National Party’ and that ‘there was a widely held view that the “beat up” was designed to remove him because of his strengths and leadership potential’ (*Sunday Mail*, 12 February 1995). As with many such allegations against political identities in Queensland, the claims made against Dewar were never proven (or disproved), though the damage ended his political career.

## Doubts over the continued stability of the Coalition

Far from resolving Coalition discord, the 1966 election kept it simmering. Indeed, shortly after the 1966 election, the Liberals announced their intention of contesting all seats in Queensland at both state and federal levels, thereby exacerbating the ‘problem’ of three-cornered contests (*Courier-Mail*, 1 April 1967). During 1967, members of the ‘ginger group’ were also active in the Parliament. They moved amendments against government legislation and delivered speeches that began to raise the ire of the cabinet and especially Nicklin and senior Country Party ministers. Their speeches expressed backbench disquiet over government policies during the Coalition’s fourth term. Chalk attempted to clamp down on the dissidents and on alleged disloyalty within the Liberal party room, adopting a tougher line on Coalition dissent and periodically threatening to resign if not fully supported. In exasperation, Chalk insisted that as leader of the party he be informed of any intention or tactic to be used in the Parliament by the restless backbenchers (*The Australian*, 3 December 1966).

The Nicklin period was, however, inevitably coming to an end, and with the pending retirement of the ageing Premier, a new political phase with new challenges would present itself. In 1968, when Nicklin retired from all his official positions, he had served a continuous term of 35 and half years in state parliament (making him then the fifth-longest serving member of the Parliament—and the sixth-longest serving after subsequently being overtaken by Bjelke-Petersen). At the time of Nicklin’s retirement, he had become the state’s longest-serving premier (10 years and five months)—a statistic surely inconceivable when he assumed office in 1957. Senior Country Party ministers were paving the way for Jack Pizzey to assume the leadership unchallenged, despite earlier health scares. Gordon Chalk, however, as the Liberal leader, increasingly began to voice more separatist sentiments under pressure from his colleagues. By late 1967, he was actively advocating that the Liberals had to ‘attain supremacy’ in the Queensland administration and that ‘this state is destined to be governed principally by those who follow the Liberal party platform’ (*Courier-Mail*, 2 September 1967). His prediction did not turn out as he hoped, but it placed him far more secure in the leadership of the parliamentary party. Nicklin had earlier warned at a Country Party conference in May 1967 that the ‘government parties could not indulge in a struggle for party supremacy and hope to escape severe censure by the electors’ (*AJHP* 1967:vol. 13, no. 3, p. 423). Nicklin’s prediction proved to be far more prescient.