

8. The early Bjelke-Petersen years, 1968-1969

The 'swinging Sixties' was a time of cultural change and challenge to the Establishment. Political protests and popular dissent took on a generational schism; social movements and mass demonstrations were inflamed by a distrust of government and a resistance to conscription and the Vietnam War. The 'New Left' was on the rise in university campuses. Student liberation seemed a potent force. 'Drop-outs' were in; hippies and flower power spread across the globe; and the drug culture and rock music became palliatives to the disenchanted. Assertive slogans came to symbolise a new generation: 'do it', 'free love', 'peace', 'make love, not war'. Meanwhile, in 1968, Czechoslovakia had been invaded by the Soviets, Paris was in turmoil with strikes and student protests, the Kennedy brothers and Martin Luther King, jr, had been assassinated and the Americans were preparing to land on the Moon. Pop songs plugged away at the themes of revolution, street-fighting men, the Age of Aquarius and emphasising the 'times they are-a-changing'. If Australia was somewhat shielded from the extremes of the 1960s, a postwar generation had now enjoyed full employment and come to expect a high standard of living as a right. The home, the Holden car and the Hills hoist were among life's little staples. The children born in the years after the war formed a huge wave of 'baby boomers' who by this time were entering adulthood and exercising their political expression and numerical strength.

In the social uncertainty and political turmoil of the late 1960s, Queensland appointed an abstemious, god-fearing Lutheran to lead the state into the 1970s. He was fifty-seven years of age and had been in the Parliament for 21 years by the time he became premier. Without a high profile, the new Premier was regarded as quiet and well groomed if a little of a 'country bumpkin' (Lunn 1984; Charlton 1983). The metropolitan press at the time presented him as a 'non-drinking, non-gambling Sunday School teacher' who was 'against just about everything' (*Truth*, 11 August 1968). Journalists produced long lists of activities he supposedly opposed (some came from his own mouth but others were allegations made by his political opponents). Included in this list were: trade unionism, the 40-hour week, long-service leave, gambling, the Golden Casket, wheels of fortune, drinking and divorce. In fact, many of Johannes Bjelke-Petersen's personal habits at the time were little different from his predecessors, but his self-righteousness and desire to inflict his own moral stance on others attracted comment. From the start, he created an impression that he was uncompromising on many political and social issues. To many observers, he soon became the object of ridicule and often his early statements

invited derision. For instance, Lunn (1984:4), in his political biography, notes that Bjelke-Petersen regarded himself as ‘the flying peanut’ and when asked why he and not the African strongman Idi Amin was Premier of Queensland, he replied: ‘Uganda had first choice.’

Yet, from the beginning of his premiership, Bjelke-Petersen showed signs of concern about his political image—a point often glossed over in some subsequent portrayals of his career. Lunn (1984:95–118), however, makes much of the claim that the Premier suddenly sought a ‘new image’ from 1971 after he fell under the spell of the media-savvy Allen Callaghan. There is some evidence, however, that Bjelke-Petersen had relied on significant journalistic advice before he hired Callaghan. Some time in 1969 he had engaged Hugh Bingham, previously from Rupert Murdoch’s *The Australian* newspaper and a columnist in the *Sunday Truth*. Perhaps some of his initial concern was motivated by a desire to minimise his Danish ancestry or his New Zealand origins. He wished to be seen as a native Queenslander through and through, so initially he emphasised different versions of his name to suit his audiences. To newspaper readers of the *Truth*, for which he wrote a regular column (assisted by Bingham), he was plain ‘Jo Petersen’—with a shortened ‘Jo’ and the ‘Bjelke’ dropped. He often used these columns to launch attacks on the opposition, as when ‘Jo Petersen’ claimed that his counterpart, Jack Houston, was merely a mouthpiece for vicious propaganda invented by the ALP’s central executive (*Sunday Truth*, 9 March 1969). At other times, he was called ‘Jo Bjelke-Petersen’ by the same newspaper (*Truth*, 16 February 1969). In the Parliament, some members, as well as the daily *Hansard*, at first referred to him as ‘Joe’ Bjelke-Petersen with an anglicised version of Joh.¹ Later, after he was more established and secure as Premier, he informed the *Hansard* staff that he preferred to be referred to as Joh whenever his first name was used.

Following his elevation to the Premiership, his parliamentary opponents were quick to seize on his perceived weaknesses or political shortcomings. Jack Melloy (ALP, Nudgee) greeted the appointment by stating:

[W]e have a new Premier, and to him I extend my congratulations and sympathies. I sympathise with him on three counts. In the first place, he is a member of the Country Party, which is doomed to destruction by the Liberal Party, so consequently his tenure of office as Premier cannot be a very lengthy one. I also sympathise with him because he has breathing down his neck all the time the de-facto Premier in the person of the Treasurer...I sympathise with him, too, because his principles are strangely out of place in this coalition Government. I do not think that

1 For example, Reg Pilbeam (Lib., Rockhampton South) in *QPD* (1968:vol. 249, pp. 15, 471).

his colleagues can conform to the standard of principles of the Premier, and I think they are going to cause him many worries during his term of office. (*QPD* 1968:vol. 249, p. 171)

Such initial assessments of Bjelke-Petersen focused on the issue of whether he was the right leader for the times, whether he had the appropriate image and the political astuteness to survive as premier. His reception was certainly a mixture of some goodwill and considerable scepticism and criticism. Among his own side of politics, he made a better start principally because he enjoyed the broad support of his own party and quickly gained the acceptance of his Coalition partners. Chairing his first joint-party meeting as Premier, he apparently told all Coalition parliamentarians that 'I don't want you to work *for* me, but work *with* me' (Bill Hewitt, Personal interview), suggesting that initially he intended to pursue a cooperative approach on policy issues and Coalition politics. Whether this initial preference for cooperation was meant genuinely or was motivated by the uncertainty of his fledgling leadership remains the subject of some speculation. His pronouncements so shortly before the next election were, however, taken as evidence of his intention to reassure the public that his government operated on the principles of collective solidarity.

His deputy, Gordon Chalk, was, however, more measured in his initial assessment of the new Premier. In a long press interview in February 1969, he was asked a question about whether, after his close relations with Nicklin and Pizzey, the 'going would be tougher' under Bjelke-Petersen. He gave a lengthy but considered reply:

[Y]ou will recall that with Mr Nicklin I was his junior in every direction. He had much more experience as leader, yet he did consult with me on many occasions for advice. Working with the late Mr John Pizzey was quite easy. He left quite a lot of the administrative and financial side to me. Dealing with Mr Bjelke-Petersen has been slightly different. Mr Petersen, I know, has a major responsibility to the Country Party and there were people who said at the time he was elected [to the Premiership] that he had not had the experience of leader, and that would be true, because he had neither been a Deputy nor had he held the Premiership. Consequently there have been a few matters in which I have tried to guide Mr Petersen, but because of the fact that he has felt my views do not coincide with his, he has exerted his right as Premier to follow a particular line of thinking. Now this is not a question of us having a major disagreement but rather it is, I think, an instance of two leaders having different opinions and the Premier feeling that as he represents the major party his views must come first...It is true that both of us

possibly are a little strong willed. On the other hand both of us have responsibilities to our parties and I suppose you can say there is a little politics in it. (*Truth*, 16 February 1969)

Although Chalk regarded Bjelke-Petersen as strong-willed, other assessments of his early days suggested he was weak and indecisive. Colin Hughes surveyed a history of state premiers, contrasting those who were weak with the strong. In Hughes' (1980:174) assessment, Bjelke-Petersen was initially a weak premier, but then became a strong one through circumstance and the force of his personality. Such initial assessments, however, did not anticipate the native cunning and utter ruthlessness Bjelke-Petersen would bring to the job.

Bjelke-Petersen's first ministry: holding the fort

In the first week of August, the Country Party was determined to wrest control of the ministry back from the Liberal leader, Gordon Chalk. Joh Bjelke-Petersen emerged from the party meeting as the nominated leader. He was at the time their most senior minister and had many favours owed him by his colleagues as a result of his time as Minister for Works and his tireless election campaigning for party colleagues in more marginal seats. Equally, however, the party saw Bjelke-Petersen as a stopgap appointment, someone his colleagues felt was deserving of the top job but who would not stay around long with younger pretenders such as Camm anxious to displace him. Bjelke-Petersen saw his main chance materialise because the Country Party had to have a nominee they could support unanimously and thereby deny Chalk the Premiership. Looking down the barrel of the gun, the Country Party members voted 20–six to nominate Bjelke-Petersen to the Premiership, and then once the vote was resolved, declared their candidate had unanimous support. Bjelke-Petersen quietly assumed the Premiership of Queensland on 8 August along with his first ministry of 13.

- Premier and Minister for State Development: Joh Bjelke-Petersen, CP
- Treasurer: Gordon Chalk, Lib.
- Minister for Mines, Main Roads and Electricity: Ronald Camm, CP
- Minister for Justice and Attorney-General: Dr Peter Delamothe, Lib.
- Minister for Education and Cultural Activities: Alan Fletcher, CP
- Minister for Local Government and Conservation: Harold Richter, CP
- Minister for Primary Industries: John Row, CP
- Minister for Health: Doug Tooth, Lib.
- Minister for Labour and Tourism: John Herbert, Lib.
- Minister for Transport: William Knox, Lib.

- Minister for Industrial Development: Frederick Campbell, Lib.
- Minister for Lands: Victor Sullivan, CP
- Minister for Works and Housing: Max Hodges, CP

Camm kept his portfolio of Mines, Main Roads and Electricity but was promoted in the ministry to third place. Every other serving minister retained their existing portfolio, with the new minister, Max Hodges (CP, Gympie), taking responsibility for Works and Housing—a department that dropped in the changeover from third place to lowest in the ministry.

The third session of the thirty-eighth Parliament resumed 12 days after the new Premier was sworn in. The session opened on 20 August to debate the Address in Reply and ran to 11 December 1968—a total of 51 sitting days. The main business of the session was twofold: to receive the Governor's opening speech and debate the Address in Reply and then allow the government to present its budget to begin the supply debate. In the opening speech, the Governor, Sir Alan Mansfield, offered condolences over the deaths of Jack Pizzey and Sir Alan Munro. He noted that the new session marked the start of the 'second century of Parliament's occupancy of this House' (*QPD* 1968:vol. 249, p. 1). After praising effusively the state's earlier pioneers and people for their contributions to the society, and listing the contributions of various industrial sectors, the Governor introduced the government's forthcoming agenda. Significantly—and paradoxically in the context of later perceptions—the new government stressed the importance of knowledge as the key to the state's future. The government took the view that 'education must continue to receive top priority in the years ahead' (*QPD* 1968:vol. 249, p. 3). Education was not, however, an end in itself; rather, it was intrinsically related to the development and occupation of the state by the residents. The Governor put the government's position cogently:

Our University, institutes of technology, technical colleges and teachers' colleges will continue to expand and develop to meet the growing needs of this State. The application of knowledge, special training, skills, and abilities is becoming increasingly important in all avenues of production, and managements as well as messenger boys must now lift their educational sights if they wish to succeed. As one of the sparsely populated parts of the earth Queensland is going to attract covetous eyes as the world's population explodes over the next 100 years, and succeeding generations may find it difficult to retain sole possession unless we and they exert every effort of a positive nature to settle and productively employ this domain. Morally our tenure of the country will become indefensible unless we can show before many more years are out that we have undertaken great works of development and settlement; that we are moving in expeditious and realistic fashion to eradicate the perennial spectre of devastating drought; that we are conserving and

developing our very great natural assets in a fashion which will ensure that Queensland will actually become a home in the foreseeable future for a vastly more numerous population. (*QPD* 1968:vol. 249, p. 3)

The new government committed itself to achieve a ‘well-balanced development’ of the various state industries in the allocation of capital and recurrent expenditure. Not surprisingly, the speech highlighted several concerns of primary producers: a new wheat agreement and dairy reconstruction plan were pending, wool prices were depressed but expected to rise and the failure to renew the International Sugar Agreement was mentioned as a particular worry for the government. In line with the government’s ‘agrarian socialist’ approach of subsidising primary producers, the Governor announced that ‘the compensating of rural industries for losses incurred through the Commonwealth’s decision not to devalue currency will continue to be closely watched by my Ministers’ (*QPD* 1968:vol. 249, p. 3).

In concluding the speech, the Governor listed the legislation the government intended to introduce in the session. Four items were mentioned: a bill to provide for a Law Reform Commission, a bill for a *Mining Act*, amendments to the *Forestry Acts* and a bill to amend the NSW and Queensland *Border Rivers Act of 1946*. In relation to the first, the Governor stated: ‘my Government considers that the systematic development of the State’s law, with a view to its codification, the elimination of archaisms and anomalies and its reform, should be entrusted to a permanent body’ (*QPD* 1968:vol. 249, p. 4).

Treasurer Chalk introduced the budget on 26 September 1968 by saying that the state’s recent drought was over and prosperity was set to return to Queensland. He titled his third financial plan as ‘Queensland’s march to progress’ budget, describing it as ‘a progressive budget of which the State will have reason to be proud’ (*QPD* 1968:vol. 249, p. 593). Presented in a new ‘attractive’ format, the budget wiped out the previous year’s deficit and promised a modest surplus. Chalk informed the House that his

desire has been to make the Tables more meaningful to the Committee [of Supply] and to assist Honourable Members and Queenslanders generally to a better understanding of the budget. I want to say to the Committee that I would be happy to consider a further review of the Tables next year, should it consider that a further alteration in presentation would be helpful. After all, this is the most important document presented to Parliament during any session and it is my sincere desire to present it in such a manner, that it can be fully understood by every citizen who desired to devote time to its serious consideration. (*QPD* 1968:vol. 249, p. 593)

The Treasurer was able to deliver tax cuts (freight rate concessions for primary producers, succession duties and land tax exemptions), while increasing spending on education by almost 20 per cent, increasing capital works and providing extra police. The government also provided increased subsidies for non-government primary and secondary schools to \$25 a student. Salary ceilings on senior public servants were also lifted in an attempt to attract and retain administrators of high calibre or with professional qualifications. The *Courier-Mail* (27 September 1968, p. 2) labelled the document a 'budget of good cheer' that was 'attractively presented, both in the simple and clear financial statement and in the new form of the tables'. It hailed Chalk as the state's latest 'pin-up boy'.

As the Parliament resumed, it became clear that the talks would restart over the International Sugar Conference in Geneva (held under the United Nations Council on Trade and Development, UNCTAD). On 29 August, the Premier, in answer to a question in the House, announced he would be attending the forthcoming conference in October. His announcement indicated the Australian Deputy Prime Minister, Jack McEwen, would head the delegation with Bjelke-Petersen as deputy leader representing 'the Australian Sugar Industry' along with a host of other industry representatives and advisers from sugar producers. The Premier made no mention of representing the Queensland government, only the sugar industry. And, like many of his later sorties on behalf of major industries, his involvement attracted controversy.

On 25 September, Ray Jones (ALP, Cairns) attempted to ask a question on notice to the Premier about the sugar conference but was prevented by the Speaker, David Nicholson, after consultation with the Premier. The intended question had been given to the Speaker earlier that day as required under *Standing Orders* but was not included on the day's *Business Paper* on the grounds it was 'ruled out of order'. Jones tried to have the matter raised the next day, but was again ruled out of order by the Speaker, who advised that the question could be put in another form. Jones responded on 26 September by challenging the Speaker's ruling and attempting to debate whether the question should be put to the Premier. The incident led to a long and vitriolic interchange between the Speaker and Jones, with the former persistently insisting the latter was out of order and defying the chair and Jones equally adamant he should be heard and that the Speaker was at fault. Despite Jones not being able to ask his question formally, it is clear from *Hansard* that the question concerned some earlier press statements speculating on 'what effect certain things would have on Australia's representation at the International Sugar Conference' (*QPD* 1968:vol. 249, p. 583).

Jones, however, was quickly silenced and the exasperated Speaker felt obliged to name the member for disobedience of a ruling of the chair. Even after the

member was named and about to be expelled, however, the Speaker offered a conciliatory gesture by giving Jones the opportunity to apologise. The Premier also urged the member to reconsider and 'express his regret' to the Speaker. The Speaker told Jones that 'I am prepared to withdraw the naming of the hon. member provided he apologises to the Chair and obeys the Chair's orders in future' (*QPD* 1968:vol. 249, p. 583). Jones refused, yet again trying to be heard, and put the question in its original form. The Premier moved for the suspension of the member for the rest of that morning's sitting (until 2.15 that afternoon) and, over an unruly opposition, the Speaker attempted to have the motion accepted but was forced to call a division and vote on the motion. The vote on the Premier's motion of suspension was carried on party lines with 34 for the motion and 25 against. By the time the vote was taken and with lunch approaching, Jones was effectively suspended for about two and one-half hours. At lunchtime, the Parliament was suspended for more than one hour and shortly after adjourned until 15 October; Jones did not miss much of the Parliament's business.

One month later, on 22 October, Jones managed to work his original question into his contribution to the supply debates (where it would go on the record but not be answered by the Premier). To the taunts that he 'got the old song "Bye, Bye, Blackbird"' (that is, he was expelled for the day), Jones read into *Hansard* the wording of his question—including the offending preamble. His question to the Premier concerned three points: the threatened withdrawal of the American delegation from the conference; the reports of a reduction in sugar mill production in 1969–70; and 'the announcement of Dr Prebisch—he was Secretary of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development—concerning reductions by up to 28 percent in the production of free market sugar'. His preamble stated:

On the eve of his departure for Geneva next Saturday, is he [the Premier] able to allay the fears apparent, in one of Queensland's major primary industries, regarding these statements, and grant assurance for the preservation of the State's future sugar production at a level not below the aggregate of the present mill peaks? (*QPD* 1968:vol. 249, p. 879)

Bjelke-Petersen, conscious of some disquiet among sugar producers about the current state of the markets, did not wish to give such an assurance, so persuaded the Speaker to protect him. Jones later recalled that he had received information from the sugar industry and, as a 'bit of a rebel in those days', he wanted to ask the Premier why he was going to Geneva if they were not going to achieve anything. He also remembered Bjelke-Petersen had been reluctant to answer to the Parliament for his actions from the start and would use the Speaker to sidestep sensitive issues. Jones remembered that at the time he had been most insistent that his original question would get into the record, so deliberately

used the supply debate to make his point, saying one of his favourite adages was 'there are many ways to kill a cat other than choking it with butter' (Ray Jones, Interview, 19 August 1998).

Bjelke-Petersen left shortly after this sitting day and spent five weeks overseas, mostly in October at the conference. It was his first chance to stride the world stage as statesman and represent Queensland's industrial interests abroad. On his return to the state, he presented a Ministerial Statement to the Parliament outlining his reading of the events. The Premier noted that 'the world free-market price [for sugar] has remained dangerously depressed for an uncomfortable period of years' (*QPD* 1968:vol. 250, pp. 1159–61). He admitted that Australia had been forced to accept both lower prices and a lower quota (of 1.1 million metric tonnes) although some concessions had been made with the acceptance of a flexible arrangement to lower quotas further should the price continue to fall. He acknowledged, however, McEwen's excellent and vigorous leadership of the delegation and complimented Trade Department officials, sugar industry personnel and advisers for their input, claiming that but for them the deal would have been far worse for Australian producers. He informed the Parliament:

I am greatly encouraged by the outcome of the five weeks of intensive negotiation in Geneva, during which many major difficulties confronted the 72-odd countries represented. These were overcome only as a consequence of what I judged to be a common acceptance of the urgent need for more orderly arrangements for the control of raw sugar being sold on the world free market. (*QPD* 1968:vol. 250, p. 1159)

Given that producer countries had agreed to withhold some 'minimum stocks', the Premier looked forward to rising future prices and to Queensland maintaining its peak mill-production tonnage.

If the sugar agreement had turned out better than expected, local politics soon took the wind from the Premier's sails. Shortly after Bjelke-Petersen returned from overseas, the government faced a gruelling by-election on 16 November for the former Premier's seat of Isis—a gap in representation of almost five months since Pizzey's death. The by-election, fought on the government's record, was the first litmus test for the new leadership. Unlike in later years, when a Melbourne Cup field of candidates would assemble for a by-election, only two candidates contested the seat: R. J. Lester for the Country Party and J. R. Blake for the ALP. Stretching from south of Bundaberg to Maryborough, the rural hinterland electorate was considered a safe Country Party seat. Pizzey had comfortably secured the seat in the general election of 1966 with 57.69 per cent of the vote to Labor's 35.34 per cent and the QLP's 6.96 per cent. The fickleness of by-elections, however, the loss of the former member's personal vote and the immediate difficulties of the government put a different complexion on the

election. The result was close. Jim Blake won 4410 votes or 51.08 per cent to Lester's 4224 or 48.92 per cent. The swing against the Country Party was 8.77 per cent although the Labor candidate scored a larger swing, of 15.74 per cent, as the ballot was not contested by the QLP. It was the first time that Labor had taken the seat in its history and the result was a spectacular snub to the new administration. The Liberal leader, Gordon Chalk, admitted in his concluding comments to the 1968–69 budget that the '[g]overnment did receive a jolt in the Isis by-election', but he denied it would affect the result of the next general election (*QPD* 1968:vol. 250, p. 1834).

'My bounden duty to uphold the dignity of Parliament'

In the Parliament, the Premier took some time to adjust to his new position and to the additional scrutiny he was placed under as head of the government. In years to come, after Bjelke-Petersen had imposed his personality on Queensland politics and notched up some incredible political wins in the process, it was commonly acknowledged that his period in office became increasingly and intensely controversial. Much of the controversy associated with his premiership dates from the 1970s through to the mid-1980s, and various dimensions of these controversies appear in later chapters of this parliamentary history. It is clear from the day-to-day record of his premiership, however, that he was a controversial figure from the very outset. Controversy and the Premier went hand-in-hand, usually fuelled by the unorthodox or idiosyncratic things he did or said and, indeed, as time went on, he developed a peculiar mutually addictive or symbiotic relationship with the media. He seemed to feed on contentious issues and they on him; and even when his own behaviour was called into question, he often gave the impression that he relished the increased public attention rather than feeling either intimidated or apologetic.

One of the first controversies to involve the Premier occurred in November 1968 immediately after his return from overseas. The matter erupted in the Parliament over a relatively trivial matter, which led to the Premier misleading the House and incurring the wrath of the Speaker. In the final months leading up to the close of the parliamentary session, opposition members had asked a series of questions about the positioning and numbers of radar traps on roads in the Brisbane area. On 7 November, Jack Melloy (ALP, Nudgee) asked a seemingly innocuous question on notice about how many police radar traps were in operation at the bottom of Kelvin Grove Hill between August and October, how many had operated in the three months prior and how many accidents had occurred. The Premier answered the three-part question with a curt: 'Nil. One.

Nil.' Melloy tried to ask a supplementary question the next day but was refused by the Speaker. He was successful on 12 November when he again asked the Premier:

Further to his Answer to my Question on November 7 about the radar trap at the bottom of Kelvin Grove Hill, will he check with the source of his information the matter contained in his Answer, as I possess a ticket which apparently contradicts the information he supplied...[and] In the light of his further inquiry, will he supply any further information in the matter? (QPD 1968:vol. 250, p. 1364)

Melloy was referring to a ticket issued to an ALP staffer, Jack Stanaway, who was booked for speeding but not breathalysed. The incident rattled the Premier, who admitted 'a further search was made of the records'. He then clarified that in fact

detection units were operated by police personnel in the vicinity of the bottom of Kelvin Grove Hill...on seventeen occasions...I regret that the information furnished to me by the Police Department on which my reply to the Honourable Member's Question on November 7 was based was incorrect and I wish to apologise to the Honourable Member and the House. (QPD 1968:vol. 250, p. 1364)

The matter did not, however, end here. The Speaker, who by then had served more than eight years in the position, was so incensed about the way the Premier, as the most senior minister, had perhaps inadvertently misled the House he wrote a letter to Bjelke-Petersen, which was also circulated to all cabinet ministers—and eventually leaked to the press. The *Truth* (1 December 1968) ran a headline describing the letter as the 'Speaker's bombshell' and an 'unprecedented reprimand' to a state premier. The paper regarded the Speaker's missive as a 'sensational "Dear Joe" letter' in which the Speaker wrote:

I am deeply concerned at a happening in the House wherein you were considerably embarrassed by one of your Departmental officers supplying you with false information for transmission to the House in the form of an answer to a question relating to police radar traps. As custodian of the rights and privileges of Members, it is my bounden duty to uphold the dignity of Parliament. Therefore, I must point out the seriousness of this matter in relation to privilege, and would respectfully request that you draw the attention of your senior officers to the fact that, had the matter been raised in the House at the time on a question of privilege, based on evidence presented by you, there can be no doubt a *prima facie* case had been established, and as a result of the deliberations of the House the officer responsible for furnishing the false information

could have been charged with contempt. Should there be any repetition of this practice, I shall consider it my duty to take what action I deem necessary in the circumstances. I have forwarded copies of this letter to all Ministers to convey to them the seriousness of Departmental officers supplying false information for presentation by Ministers to Parliament. (*Truth*, 1 December 1968)

The paper suggested that the reprimand had ‘rocked’ cabinet ministers and was likely to ‘widen still further rifts that have become serious in the coalition in recent months’. The incident also soured relations between the Premier and Nicholson as Speaker and, although Nicholson survived as Speaker for another term before resigning from the Parliament in 1972, it made the Premier more wary of his independence. This incident probably sharpened the Premier’s instinct that independent-minded speakers were to be distrusted—and subsequent appointees to the office generally became more reliable and less troublesome to the Premier or the other members of the executive.

A more serious scandal soon dogged the new Premier’s early years, involving his (or his family’s) business interests and company share dealings, which he attended to while in office. The main concerns raised by his political opponents and media journalists were often over perceived conflicts of interest and over the lack of official procedures to handle conflict-of-interest situations. During the early months of 1969, various pieces of information and allegations surfaced concerning the new Premier’s holdings of shares in oil companies that were also negotiating with the state government. Bjelke-Petersen had long held shares in mining ventures and saw nothing wrong with having private pecuniary interests when, at the same time, he was involved in making official government decisions that could advantage such interests. As he saw it, mining shares were inherently risky investments that could benefit the state and he was not one to relinquish his private holdings simply because he had become a minister of the Crown—nor did he have concerns about others in the ministry similarly holding shares or business interests in areas that were close to their portfolio responsibilities. When the Opposition Leader later attacked him over his share holdings, the Premier said:

[A]s far back as 1954 I first began looking for oil in Queensland. I always have been keen on development. I pioneered scrub pulling and aerial seeding and spraying in Queensland...Ask Mr Houston what he has done? He has done nothing except attack me for being a developer. (*Courier-Mail*, 3 March 1969)

This defence became one of the Premier’s hallmarks: when confronted with accusations of conflicts of interest, he continued to spin the line that he was a pioneering premier who had been active in development. He argued that the

state needed more such people to invest and take 'risks'. He also became adept at turning criticisms of himself back onto his critics. When attacked over his business interests, he would attempt to deflect criticism by suggesting that it was Houston who was not prepared to be personally involved in investing in Queensland development (a somewhat practical difficulty if not problematic for ideological reasons for a working-class trade union official). It is arguable that, even from these early days as Premier, Bjelke-Petersen began to develop the notion that he was, or should be, above criticism. It also represents an indefatigable belief that his activities were preordained and he was doing God's will.

One of the immediate problems facing the opposition and the media in 'exposing' the Premier (and his other ministers) over conflicts of interest was finding out accurate information. The Premier, for one, was generally very reluctant to disclose his personal affairs or those of his family members. He regarded them as private matters and not for public consumption. Speculation was fanned by the absence of confirmed evidence. Labor Senator George Georges raised allegations against Bjelke-Petersen in the Australian Parliament only to have them dismissed by the Premier, who claimed the use of federal parliamentary privilege was a 'grave injustice' (*Courier-Mail*, 5 March 1969). Jack Houston responded: 'I am disgusted at the arrogant attitude of the Premier towards the very serious charges levelled against him. No democracy can exist in a situation where a Premier is charged and he becomes his own judge and jury and declares himself innocent of the charges' (*Courier-Mail*, 5 March 1969).

Exact evidence was still difficult to discover. Eventually, Bjelke-Petersen was accused by Houston of demanding 'the right to hold 500,000 shares in an oil company actually dealing with his own government' (*Telegraph*, 15 May 1969). The ALP began calling for the Parliament to subpoena all records of transactions involving oil companies, not just from cabinet deliberations but across all government departments. In March 1969, the ALP's parliamentary executive called an emergency meeting on the matter and after a debate lasting more than eight and a half hours declared 'this executive has considered the evidence against the Premier in his petroleum share dealings and regards him as an unfit person to lead the Government of Queensland'. The ALP demanded the urgent recall of the Parliament and called on the Governor not to 'allow the present Government to extend the adjournment of Parliament beyond the existing date, March 11' (*Courier-Mail*, 4 March 1969). With the Parliament not in session in the lead-up to the state election, it proved impossible, however, for Labor to translate its demands into reality. Labor did succeed in elevating concerns about pecuniary conflicts of interest and government propriety as election issues, but the Premier, in particular, ignored such concerns with a

grim determination and was able to survive the allegations. This would not be the only time such concerns would haunt the Premier; on the contrary, they would recur throughout his entire career and follow him into retirement.

***Au revoir, mes amis*—we'll miss you**

With the term of the thirty-eighth Parliament drawing to a close, some members began to reminisce about their careers and acknowledge the culture of camaraderie within the legislature. On many separate occasions, members spoke of the bonds of friendship they enjoyed across the Chamber. On only the second day of the last session, Bjelke-Petersen touched on this when he read a motion of condolence for Sir Alan Munro, the former Minister for Industrial Development and Liberal leader in the early years of the Coalition government. In his speech, the Premier reminded members that

less than two years ago, on the rising of the Thirty-seventh Parliament, the late Sir Alan Munro, in responding to a tribute from all sides of the Chamber, said that although parliamentary life was something of a battle he was sure that, in spite of political differences, Parliamentarians could look upon the great majority of their fellows as friends. (*QPD* 1968:vol. 249, p. 12)

Later, another member, Cecil Carey (CP, Albert), used the supply debate to say farewell to a number of long-serving members who had indicated they would retire at the next election (due by mid-1969). He told the House that ordinary members had but

two opportunities during a session of Parliament to embark on a Cook's tour, as it were, and mention any matter at all. And I gladly use some of the time allotted to me in this debate to say thanks to those hon. members who are retiring for their wonderful friendship and fellowship, and for their goodwill to me during the 8½ years I have had the pleasure and responsibility of looking after the electorate of Albert...They certainly do not all belong to the Country Party or the Liberal Party. Some of them are Independents, and quite a few are Labor members, but I still regard them as my personal friends. We may argue in debate, and we may even get a little heated, but...I have not found one with whom I would not be happy to associate outside the Chamber. (*QPD* 1968:vol. 249, p. 951)

Carey continued his fervent speech by implying that the forthcoming election would be both a painful exercise and something of a nuisance. He genuinely felt remorse that

some of us have to take the axe; but there is no-one here that I dislike to the extent of wishing to see him defeated. If I had my way, I would pass a Bill that we could all sit here for the next three years and have six consecutive years in this Chamber, instead of having the trouble of handing out 'How to Vote' cards and getting all hot and bothered, as we do, when an election is held. (*QPD* 1968:vol. 249, p. 953)

Overlooking the fact that the Chamber was not composed entirely of men (Vi Jordan, ALP, Ipswich West, had been a member since 1966), these were probably the last years in the Queensland Parliament when such amicable sentiments could be articulated by members.

Others, however, used the occasion to pour scorn on political opponents and the personal reputations of members opposite. In an Address-in-Reply debate—supposedly a debate on the government's policies and program—Fred Bromley (ALP, Norman) launched a venomous attack on the Liberals, accusing them of internal divisions and ruthlessness in dealing with dissidents. Returning to the Dewar affair, Bromley referred to the

move by the Liberal Party to get rid of the hon. member for Wavell, Mr Dewar. Everyone knows, of course, that when a member of the Liberal Party gets off-side with the strength, his head is chopped off. They say, 'Right! We will go about this properly. We will seek and destroy'...and they go about chopping his or her head off in a systematic way...In the case of the hon. member for Wavell, to add insult to injury, they chopped his head off and threw it in his face. Everyone in this Chamber knows the background to that case—how the Minister for Labour and Tourism [John Herbert], who is in the Chamber this afternoon, was jealous of the attraction that the hon. member for Wavell had for girls when he was a Minister of the Crown.

Mr Speaker: Order! I think the hon. member must realise that personal attacks against members of Parliament, whether they are members of the Government or members of the Opposition, are totally out of order. I ask him, please, to confine himself to decent remarks and to address the House as it should be addressed.

Mr Bromley: I have not attacked any Minister.

Mr Speaker: Order! I have not yet had to wear a hearing aid. I am perfectly well aware of what the hon. member said.

Mr Bromley: Thank you, Mr Speaker. We all know that one of the Commandments is 'Love Thy Neighbour'. It is one that I follow religiously. However, there are times when one must reveal to people in

this State what really does go on and have it included in '*Hansard*' so that it will go down in history. I do not intend, of course, to attack any Minister or former Minister; but all hon. members know that at one time the Minister for Labour and Tourism did hang the nickname of 'Alex the Adorable' on Mr Dewar. That seems to be well known, and I don't think that could be classed as an attack by me.

Mr Speaker: Order! I warn the hon. member for the last time that if he continues in that personal strain, reflecting on members of this House, I shall name him.

Mr Bromley: Very well, Mr Speaker. I shall deal with the events in Wavell. It was common knowledge in the Wavell electorate that the hon. member for Wavell was going to get the axe and that he would not be endorsed by the Liberal Party to contest the Wavell seat at the next election. So, of course, he was forced to resign from the party. He told us about this in the House the other day. He himself spoke about the incident. He had been on the outer with the party out there for some time, and in the House itself he was not even made welcome at Caucus meetings. Consequently, he did not attend any Caucus meetings... Then, in came the project 'D. D.', which is a code name used within the Liberal Party ranks. For the information of the House, it stands for 'Dice Dewar'. In addition to the various troubles that are appearing, and have appeared for some time, within the Liberal Party—the hon. member for Wavell has himself referred to disloyalty within the party—we all know about the move that was underway to dispose of the hon. member for Toowong, and other members such as the hon. member for Kurilpa. These manoeuvres operate under code names 'P. P.'—'Pin-point Porter', and 'H. H.'—'Hijack Hughes'. To date, the enemy in these cases has been repulsed. In Kurilpa, in the case of 'H. H.'—'Hijack Hughes'—the ALP candidate will have to do the job. (*QPD* 1968:vol. 249, pp. 395–696)

So, not all was wine and roses among the good members in the Chamber. The point of such personal attacks on colleagues was not just salacious interest or disingenuous abuse of parliamentary privilege; rather the personal attacks became the catalyst for wider political criticisms of party procedures and machinations that would otherwise remain invisible in the general passage of parliamentary business.

In a similar vein, the ALP Member for Rockhampton North, Merv Thackeray, was also tempted to settle scores when given the opportunity. Thackeray was one of the few members who had ever said anything bad about Nicklin's character in public (see Stevenson 1985). As the Parliament was nearing its end, he began to reminisce on the 'old days', thanking Jack Duggan for being a 'father to

me' and a very close friend. He praised his retiring Labor colleagues (especially Jim Donald, Johnno Mann and Jack Dufficy), but saved special mention for the Country Party's Alf Muller, who deserved 'some good words' because

if ever a man was crucified in this House it is Alf Muller. Two Premiers cut his head right off. They were Frank Nicklin and the late Jack Pizey. The former Treasurer, Tom Hiley, should be included with them, too. If ever a man was ostracised and cut to pieces it was Alf Muller, and those three gentlemen did the job. (*QPD* 1968:vol. 249, p. 1046)

Address-in-Reply debates and supply debates gave ordinary parliamentarians the chance to strike back and get things off their chests—and some about to retire and without fear of reprisal decided to avail themselves of the opportunity.

To end the third parliamentary session, the Premier rose to move the adjournment of the Assembly on 11 December. In doing so, he acknowledged that 10 members had collectively served the state in the Parliament for a total of 223 years. He particularly singled out some of the more prominent retiring members for special mention. He also acknowledged the work of Alf Muller, who, despite running foul of former premiers, had served one term as Minister for Public Lands and Irrigation (1957–60). According to the Premier, Muller had remained 'a very close personal friend of mine and is greatly respected by all of us'. Next, Labor's 'Johnno' Mann, a former Speaker, and Jack Duggan, the former Deputy Premier and Opposition Leader, were both 'farewelled' with the observation that 'whilst we did not always like their opposition we have appreciated their friendship and will miss them'. Others acknowledged were the ALP's Fred Graham (Mackay), Jim Donald (Ipswich East), Peter Byrne (Mourilyan) and Joe Dufficy (Warrego). Two longstanding independents were also retiring: Arthur Coburn (Burdekin) and 'Bunny' Adair (Cook). Finally, the Premier thanked the retiring Eddie Beardmore (CP, Balonne) for his jokes and songs, remembering that on one occasion when out west campaigning for another member he had been asked to sing an 'Eddie Beardmore song'. Not one to break out into song, the dour Premier had instead chosen to tell an 'Eddie Beardmore story' to the assembled group, which he recounted to the amusement of the Chamber:

One day when Eddie came home from work to his property outside St George, his wife said to him, 'Eddie, there's a job for you. Young John is away up under the house (the house was a very low-set one) and he won't come out. You get under the house and get him out and give him a good hiding because he's been a naughty boy.' Eddie said, 'I got down and I wriggled and crawled, and when I got up near where John was he said, "Dad, is Mum after you too".' (*QPD* 1968:vol. 250, p. 2326)

If Beardmore was fondly remembered for his wit, others were seemingly more equivocal. Thackeray had earlier bid farewell to Beardmore by saying he was 'a great old guy', but added: 'He came into Parliament a little late in life, and I do not think he had an opportunity to fully grasp the activities of Parliament. However, while he was here he devoted himself to his parliamentary duties' (*QPD* 1968:vol. 249, p. 1046).

Faint praise indeed!

In closing, the Premier generously thanked and acknowledged the retirement of the Clerk of the Parliament, Roy Dunlop, who, remarkably, had served the Parliament for 50 years from 1918. Dunlop had been appointed Clerk in 1954 and had worked under 13 different premiers and 10 speakers. This observation caused Bjelke-Petersen to comment somewhat caustically that 'it seems that Speakers last longer than Premiers'. Such was not to be the case, however, with *this* Premier—he would outlast six speakers in his term as Premier, and in the 40 years he served as a Member of Parliament (1947–87), would sit under nine different speakers.

The 1969 election: the 'most strenuous campaign' the government had ever faced

The Parliament did not sit between December 1968 and the state election, which was called for 17 May 1969—almost three years to the day since the previous election. It was a long and hard-fought campaign, which Treasurer Chalk described as 'the most strenuous of his nine campaigns' (*Sunday Mail*, 11 May 1969). It was also an election in which the Labor Party, having lost four previous campaigns, was generally expected to improve its vote, not only because it had rallied somewhat since the change of premier, but because the government was beginning to look jaded and out of touch with the popular mood. Labor's stocks were also bolstered by its recent victory in the Isis by-election. There were also clear conflicts within the Coalition, especially over the issue of leadership, with doubts about whether Bjelke-Petersen had the charisma and political skills to lead the government. The fear of communism within Australia was receding as an election issue and the DLP was now much less a force, with only one-quarter of its former electoral support (down to 6.38 per cent at the 1966 election). As was common in those days, however, the weaknesses of the opposition and the achievements of the government tended to be magnified in people's minds. So, in the end, Labor would come close to matching the Coalition in the primary vote but, under the zonal system, would fall far short of winning sufficient seats to oust the government.

A total of 246 candidates stood for the 78 seats in the 1969 election. Twelve seats were vacant at the election—a Queensland record—because of the large number of retirements of sitting members. Against 77 ALP candidates, the Country Party stood 39 candidates and the Liberals a further 44 candidates. The DLP contested 61 seats, while 23 independents contested the election. From the start, the main protagonists had to work hard to inject enthusiasm into the campaign. Opinion polls seemed to suggest that even midway through the campaign ‘most electors are standing aloof’. The *Courier-Mail* went on to comment that endorsed candidates were resorting to gimmicks to attract voters. Under the headline ‘Banners in fight to win the vote’, the paper described the campaign as one in which

boaters, banners and boomerangs and even the old-fashioned morning tea party are being injected into the state election campaign to give it more sparkle...For the candidate, electioneering means as much of the door-knock hand-shake approach as one can possibly do in four weeks. Fifteen gross [or 2160] of straw boaters with a distinctive band have come from the ALP box of election tricks to identify candidates and leading supporters. The party’s Greenslopes candidate, Aboriginal rights worker Mrs Kath Walker, has a boomerang motif on her election signs. (*Courier-Mail*, 29 April 1969)

Not only was the 1969 campaign a protracted affair, the sudden change of Premier in mid-1968 effectively meant that the main four parties had been actively campaigning long before the election date was announced. Questions about the political leadership of the state became pronounced in the campaign, overshadowing differences of policy. Chalk told the press at the end of the campaign that personalities appeared more prominent than policy issues in both the popular mood and the reporting of the election. He was of the view that ‘people this time are looking at the images of the Premier, the Opposition Leader, and my own as Leader of the Liberal Party’. He felt that this meant ‘people are considering quite seriously who they believe would be most able to be at the head of affairs of government in Queensland’. For Chalk, this represented an entirely new scenario because ‘when Sir Frank Nicklin was Premier and Mr John Duggan was Opposition Leader, the images were known. They weren’t a question in elections. This time they’re important’ (*Sunday Mail*, 11 May 1969).

The new Premier was still struggling to establish a distinctive image, so that became one of the main political issues of the campaign. He went to great pains to stress he was a determined and forceful figure: ‘For my part as new Premier with quite definite ideas of my own, I hope to show quite clearly that I am not afraid to tackle fundamental issues. I believe Queenslanders will accept that I would still tackle them, election year or not’ (*Truth*, 9 February 1969).

He also emphasised his rural background and frequently directed media attention to his previous and continuing farming activities as a peanut farmer and land-clearer. He was also anxious to convey his own personal style as matter-of-fact, earthy and unpolished—just like his electors. What is more, even from the beginning of his premiership, he was sensitive to criticism. In February, Bjelke-Petersen felt obliged to respond to opposition attacks criticising the anti-drinking attitudes of his government. He promised a ‘review’ of liquor licensing laws but hit back at the Opposition Leader for attacking the government

for daring to protect people from their own weaknesses. A man had the right to drink himself to death if he so wished, the ALP leader said. ‘Provided,’ he added rather lamely, ‘he does no harm to others.’ To me, this is an incredibly irresponsible statement by a man who aspires to premiership. Would he also say that a man has the right to ‘drug’ himself to death? Or ‘drink-drive’ himself to death? This is typical of the irresponsible ‘catch-cries’ the ALP is applying in a wretched attempt to confuse the public mind. (‘Jo Petersen reports’, *Telegraph*, 23 February 1969)

The Premier announced in opening the annual Warwick Show in March 1969 that ‘people are getting sick of these attacks on my sincerity and character...I get irate when our political opponents continually knock Queensland and try to shatter the confidence of others willing to help in the development of the State’. He told the gathering that Labor had ‘made many attacks on the Government in recent times and this is only natural in an election year. These attacks have failed and the ALP has now switched to personal attacks on me as Premier’ (*The Australian*, 8 March 1969).

More than anything else, however, Bjelke-Petersen wanted to be portrayed as a man of action, someone who could get things done. So, to assist with the cultivation of a new image, Bjelke-Petersen became the first Queensland Premier and one of the first Australian politicians to employ the services of a public relations consultant—or, in the language of the day, a ‘PR man’ (namely, L. J. McGovern, who became the head of the state Public Relations Bureau). The Premier, intending to soften his image, had hired the outside consultant in late 1968 and was persuaded to visit racetracks and pubs to broaden his appeal (Lunn 1984:70–4). He was persuaded to turn a blind eye to an occasion of public drinking in the main street of Finch Hatton in north Queensland when three kegs of free beer were provided illegally at a ‘Meet-the-Premier barbecue’. The Premier was subsequently ‘rewarded’ with the headline: ‘Teetotal Premier in beer keg party—street is closed; police join illegal drinkers.’ The report also mentioned that the first keg was bought by Tom Newbery (CP, Mirani) and that the Mines Minister, Ron Camm (CP, Whitsunday), ‘shouted’ the full bar of the local pub when the Premier entered (*Truth*, 16 February 1969). One ‘staged’

press photo of the Premier admiring a racehorse was captioned 'showing the flag and socking it to them in the country' (*Sunday Mail*, 16 February 1969). Country Party election material picked up this message, urging voters to 'vote Country Party and Premier Jo!' (with an exclamation mark under a smiling avuncular face) and suggesting that 'Premier Jo Petersen's Country Party team' is the 'party that cares about people' (*Sunday Mail*, 11 May 1969).

The use of public relations expertise for political leaders opened a new chapter in Queensland political campaigning. Indeed, the 1969 campaign came to mark a watershed in state politics, as from that point on political leaders were increasingly packaged as products to be marketed to a public that was at times over-credulous. This was the first election in which the techniques of 'image making' were used and played a significant role. Although the Public Relations Bureau had existed as a unit under Nicklin, the bureau now took on a more politicised role. It 'prepared election telecasts and broadcasts for the Premier, placed newspaper blocks and copies of Bjelke-Petersen's biography with every Queensland newspaper and issued 80 sets of speakers' notes to each of the coalition parties, and for three months before the election the unit supplied film footage on state development projects to local television stations (Hazlehurst 1987:253-4). The new Premier's minder, McGovern, was reported to have stated in 1969 that his unit had 'been a very powerful support for the present Government since it assumed office' (Hazlehurst 1987:254). From that moment on, the increased focus on the political leader, together with the reliance on media advisers, began to change the nature of campaigning. Electioneering would become increasingly presidential and stage-managed in form, promoting a favourable leadership image.

The Coalition government again chose a joint policy launch with Bjelke-Petersen giving the first speech in Toowoomba on Tuesday 22 April and Chalk delivering part two in Brisbane on Wednesday 23 April. In Toowoomba, the Premier pledged a 'continuation of sound, progressive government for every section of the community'. He told voters the issue of the election was either to 'continue on the high road to development by the bold partnership between government and private enterprise, or whether to enter an era of hesitation, confusion and stagnation with development controlled by the militant left-wingers of the Labor Party and the doctrinaire socialists of the Brisbane Trades Hall' (*Courier-Mail*, 23 April 1969). About 350 local people turned out to hear the Premier and journalists reported that they were attentive and 'at times enthusiastic' in hearing the hour-long speech. The crowd made no interjections and asked no questions after he had finished (*Courier-Mail*, 23 April 1969).

Bjelke-Petersen's main policy commitments in the campaign promised government assistance for housing and schools. He made a point of rejecting demands to liberalise the hotel trading of liquor on Sundays, but did agree to

grant more restaurant, motel and club licences. Pensioners would receive lower motor vehicle registration fees and dairy farmers more subsidies, while charges for road and rail transport would be reviewed after the election. The Premier also announced a reorganisation of the senior police command.

Elsewhere in the campaign, Bjelke-Petersen attempted to portray the Country Party, which was often perceived as anachronistic, as a 'modern and all-embracing political force'. He also suggested that the party 'offered a sound platform in the modern sense to all sections of the community—it was free of factions and jealousies and rock solid in Parliament' (*Courier-Mail*, 28 March 1969). He rated the main achievements of the Coalition government as: the world's largest alumina refinery at Gladstone, the location of a 'modern town built at Weipa on remote Cape York Peninsula' to mine bauxite, the first state to operate a commercial oil field and the first to pipe natural gas to a capital city. He continued by boasting of the 'world's largest [coal] dragline at Moura' and that Queensland would become the 'largest coal-exporting State'. He also mentioned that 'in one area alone—education—voters may be surprised to know that there were only 36 state high schools built in Queensland up to 1957. Today there are 101' (*Telegraph*, 16 May 1969). These messages were directed not only to his Labor opponents but to the Liberal Party, which was attempting to enhance its own stocks by suggesting unfavourable comparisons between the two Coalition leaders. The Liberals chose an electoral pitch that featured Chalk as a more dynamic 'premier' more 'in tune' with prevailing attitudes, whereas Bjelke-Petersen was portrayed as old fashioned and lacking initiative.

The Deputy Premier completed the joint policy speech by emphasising the unity among the Coalition over the advancement of Queensland interests. He told a rowdy Brisbane audience that economic growth was above the national average and that Queensland was no longer a 'veritable no-man's land' but had now been 'lifted to the forefront'. Business was 'no longer worried about the socialistic ideology which it experienced while Labor was in office and is prepared to invest here because it trusts us' (*Courier-Mail*, 24 April 1969). Chalk announced tax concessions, a major new power station for central Queensland, enhancements to transportation and an extension of the state's free public hospital system. He made special mention of the government's intention to establish a series of community-based geriatric centres to provide care to the growing number of aged patients. He committed the government to begin to tackle environmental problems by setting up an advisory pollution-control council consisting of representatives of state and local government, business and 'housewives' organisations'. The Liberal Party had also indicated that it would seek to extend the life of both state and federal parliaments by one year from three to four years. This proposal derived from an earlier state council resolution of March in which the party suggested that under present three-year

terms there was effectively only one year of real legislative life in a parliament before members began to consider their own re-election (*Courier-Mail*, 20 March 1969).

In contrast with the government, the opposition fragmented its policy speeches, with Jack Houston delivering three regional policy speeches before 'summing up' with a further four to complete the campaign. The fragmented policy speeches aimed at specific target audiences were a departure from the interminable speeches (usually provided without written copies being available) associated with policy launches of the past. The ALP announced it was 'looking to this innovation to give its policy the widest possible coverage and to allow electors to digest it piece by piece' (*Courier-Mail*, 17 April 1969). In February, Houston gave some indication of his likely cabinet if he were to be successful at the forthcoming poll. He told journalists that

we haven't a shadow Cabinet as such. What we have had over the past three years has been chairman of committees—with one chairman virtually pairing two ministerial portfolios. If we are returned as a government then these men will be the nucleus of the Cabinet and include—Horace Davies, Pat Hanlon, Fred Newton, Doug Sherrington, Fred Bromley, Eugene O'Donnell and Percy Tucker. (*Courier-Mail*, 27 February 1969)

The ALP's promises included 'sweeping' changes to the liquor laws, reduced rail freight rates, 'an overhaul of the breathalyser legislation' and a restriction on police using radar speed traps (the last two were a source of much complaint from residents of city electorates). Houston delivered a special policy speech for women (believed by ALP officials to be the first time this had occurred in Australia) in which he announced a series of 'women's reforms' including legislation on consumer protection, the welfare of children unable to attend school and the removal of discriminatory practices against widows who had to leave their Housing Commission homes if their husbands died. Houston also kept returning to the theme that 'Brisbane is the forgotten city' for the Country Party-led government (*Telegraph*, 15 May 1969). He claimed that only Labor would prioritise policies for the city and that even a vote for Liberal candidates was a vote for the continuation of Country Party control, for Bjelke-Petersen remaining as Premier and for the neglect of Brisbane and neighbouring areas.

Houston accused the new Premier, Bjelke-Petersen, of trying to introduce the 'ugly head of sectarianism' into the campaign, attacking him personally for raising the 'state aid' issue in front of schoolchildren in Emerald (*Courier-Mail*, 12 March 1969). The Opposition Leader also attacked the government over claims of politicisation of the public service. In late March, Houston produced a copy of a letter by Bjelke-Petersen, which, he said, proved the Premier was trying

to use the public service in the government's election campaign. The produced letter had been written to Country Party ministers seeking information from their departments on selected electorates—a task that would involve public service assistance (the letter sought information and photographs of examples of buildings, schools, irrigation schemes and primary industry projects). The information was sought for 39 of the state's 78 electorates, which either were held by sitting Country Party members or had been targeted by the party as possible gains. Houston rebuked the Premier, claiming: 'I deplore this blatant misuse of the public service and public money for party political gain' (*Sunday Mail*, 30 March 1969). Houston kept returning to the theme that the public service had been used during the campaign to collect a 'blatant piece of propaganda for the election' (*Courier-Mail*, 14 May 1969).

The Democratic Labor Party (DLP) reported that it had more funds at its disposal in 1969 than ever before. Its policies were aimed at increased provisions for 'pensioners and elderly people', arguing that the 'government should provide funds for young people willing to care for aged relatives in their own homes' (*Sunday Mail*, 11 May 1969). The DLP favoured less government debt and lower taxes, but their message was becoming increasingly marginal to the main campaign.

Among the various policy issues raised, economic development dominated the campaign. In March, the government had indicated that 'development is [the] election issue' (*Courier-Mail*, 20 March 1969). The government committed itself to 'encourage the channelling of private capital into the establishment of resource-based industries' to assist regional industry and promote mining exports. Bjelke-Petersen managed to win strong business support with this appeal especially as his message was accompanied by a public scare campaign insisting that a Labor government would undermine development.

The terms under which mining exploration and mineral exportation took place, however, and the involvement of foreign investors became particularly contentious. In the face of sustained opposition pressure, the government sought to justify 'the use of overseas capital to develop coal export industries based on Moura, Blackwater and Goonyella' (*Courier-Mail*, 20 March 1969). It also highlighted further expansion of the major alumina project at Gladstone as evidence of the attraction of overseas capital. Against these claims the ALP argued that the Coalition government was 'selling the farm bit by bit' such that the state was dominated by Japanese and American mining interests. Houston maintained a constant attack on the Queensland government's 'open-door' foreign investment policy, saying that the state was

becoming known as the last haven in the world where foreign interests can easily secure 100 per cent control over rich mineral assets...for

bargain rate returns...The Country Party/Liberal Party Government demanded the right to hand over billions of tons of Queensland coal until the year 2010 for 5c a ton royalty—the price of an ice cream cone. (*Courier-Mail*, 16 April 1969)

For the ALP, the other significant element associated with this attack was that many cabinet ministers had been accused of benefiting personally from mining. Although most ministers ducked for cover during the election campaign, Bjelke-Petersen appeared politically astute in countering the allegations he had engaged in any impropriety or conflicts of interest over his own pecuniary interests and particularly his vast mining shares.

Not all comment was, however, favourable to the government's policy approach to the economy. In a stinging rebuke to the Premier, journalist Ken Davidson, writing in *The Australian* (3 May 1969), argued that

the drought in Queensland may yet cost the Australian taxpayer more than if it had happened in some other State. In a State which has a Country Party Government and a valuable rural vote, the current drought adds a highly volatile element to the elections to be held this month. Already the Prime Minister, Mr Gorton, has offered the Premier, Mr Bjelke-Petersen, 50–50 assistance up to \$4 million for the direct costs of drought and 100 per cent assistance beyond that point. In effect, the Commonwealth Government has said that the direct budgetary costs of the drought to the Queensland Government will be limited to \$2 million...But Mr Bjelke-Petersen is not satisfied...He wants also subsidised wheat as feed for stock in drought areas...Subsidised wheat for stock feed is not an economical proposition because it would have to be kept up for 7 months. It is unlikely that any rain will now fall in the drought-affected areas until the normal seasonal summer rains come at the end of the year. In the national interest it would be better if stock levels were reduced to a nucleus of breeding animals during the rest of the drought period. Of course rational policies are difficult to accept in a state where acres are more important than people in an election year. It is perhaps for this reason that the State spends less money per capita on...social welfare (education, health, hospitals and charities and law, order and public safety) than any other in the Commonwealth.

These issues of federal–state disagreement and the inconsistencies of policy approaches were to remain constant themes throughout the Bjelke-Petersen era and beyond.

‘Jekyll and Hyde’ premiers, protesters, three-way contests and preference swaps

Tensions within the Coalition emerged publicly during the election campaign due to two related incidents: an overt campaign by the Liberals to promote Gordon Chalk as the future Premier and a decision by the Country Party to swap preferences with the ALP in one Gold Coast seat. Again the vexed question of which Coalition party would or should remain the senior partner reared its head in April when press reports carried articles stressing the Country Party ‘won’t bow to [the] Liberals in Coalition’ (*Telegraph*, 11 April 1969). The Premier told journalists that his rural party was not prepared to ‘abdicate as the dominant partner’ in the Coalition and that ‘the Country Party is the dominant party and undoubtedly will stay as such’. The Liberals, however, deliberately chose to launch a provocative campaign in the last week of the election with advertisements in newspapers claiming ‘Gordon Chalk is the one to lead’ (*Telegraph*, 11 May 1969). The *Telegraph* claimed that key Liberals were behind the campaign, which was described as a ‘new move for Chalk as Premier’. The advertisements were carried in provincial newspapers in areas where Liberal candidates were challenging Country Party candidates. Resorting to such public tactics was a telling sign that the Liberals were dissatisfied with their junior status in the Coalition, which gave them only the Deputy Premier’s position and fewer ministers in cabinet. The Liberals’ advertisements were thus directed not at general voters but at their Coalition partners, reminding them that Liberals had not relinquished their aspirations for Chalk to become Premier and were indeed prepared to step up their campaign to this end. This was an unusual political move in the last week of the campaign and risked drawing attention to the disunity in the Coalition.

The Country Party regarded this push as an overt and none-too-subtle tactic to promote Chalk into the Premiership. When interviewed, however, Bjelke-Petersen appeared relatively relaxed with the slogan and denied a rift with Chalk, commenting that although ‘there had been differences of opinion on certain issues, these had been made quite clear’ and he had no objections to Chalk’s ‘ultimate objective to becoming Premier—that is quite good’ (*Telegraph*, 11 May 1969). Although Bjelke-Petersen sounded relaxed, it was clear the Liberals had made their point.

Chalk, however, had his own problems closer to home. In April, he had been roundly heckled at a public meeting in the Brisbane suburb of Camp Hill, in the Liberal electorate of Chatsworth. The meeting, called in support of Bill Hewitt’s re-election, turned into a rowdy session when Chalk spoke. According to press reports of the incident, the Deputy Premier was booed and hissed at his first ‘meet the people meeting’, when a small group of young people within the

crowd challenged him on education, police powers at student demonstrations and freedom of speech. The students were critical of the Liberals for not standing up to the Country Party 'that controls [the state] with only 19 per cent of the State's vote' (*Courier-Mail*, 2 April 1969). Chalk told his Liberal supporters that the youths were interested only in being ejected from the meeting and arrested. On a serious note, Chalk warned the meeting that the campaign had degenerated into 'character assassination' but promised that the Liberals would not participate in such tactics.

Three weeks later, he was again the subject of controversy in his own electorate of Lockyer. Long seen to be a city-based Liberal, Chalk began to have difficulty convincing the local constituency he as a Liberal was their best option as their local member. A major 'rift' developed in April in which Chalk was publicly told that Coalition members were 'dissatisfied' with his performance. After a meeting in Grantham, a 'cross-section of Government supporters' including some senior Country Party officials (operating under the label of the Committee of Political Realists) 'accused their long standing Member of Parliament, Liberal Party Leader (Mr Chalk) of having failed to represent them adequately, and warned him he might lose his seat' (*Courier-Mail*, 28 April 1969). Chalk was attacked particularly because he did not live in the electorate but instead chose to live in Brisbane. One of the organisers of this protest, Les Metcalf, also authorised a vicious leaflet in which Chalk was shown as the 'Jekyll and Hyde of Lockyer': in his Dr Jekyll guise, he was shown as a benign country representative but in his Mr Hyde form he became a self-interested demagogue who had sprouted horns and who fought only for the Liberal cause. In the leaflet, Chalk is portrayed as being only irregularly in the Lockyer Valley and saying 'as a Liberal in Lockyer I have the wholehearted support of the Country Party (through its State President)—I think!'; but most of the time when he was in Brisbane (where he lived), Chalk was shown with campaign buttons reading 'I'm the Greatest' and 'Me for Premier'. He was shown saying 'defeat the Country Party. Liberals are King. I'll be Premier. More power for the city—less for the country. I'm for road taxes. One vote, one value—almost! Pity about Jo...Liberal me for rural Lockyer? Wonderful' (the leaflet was subsequently published in the *Telegraph*, 15 May 1969).

Chalk replied to these criticisms when he addressed a gathering of 350 disgruntled people in Lockyer. Both groups of protagonists—hecklers and supporters—were present and, according to the press reports, the day after the

Liberal leader vigorously defended himself against a stream of local criticism in his own electorate of Lockyer... While most of them came to cheer, they heard Mr Chalk handle brilliantly scores of interjections and a series of questions from his chief public critics of recent days... In the lively meeting, Mr Chalk's 'Trump card' in defence of his representation

of Lockyer was the revelation that Cabinet had decided only yesterday that the Government would buy the private hospital in Gatton, renovate it, and turn it into a public one, to fill a long-felt need in the district... Throughout, Mr Chalk faced sporadic interjections. When he revealed that he had had lucrative opportunities to get out of politics an irritated farmer shouted: 'Want to grow spuds?' 'You are always in Japan or somewhere', complained another. Stressing that he had spent 163 days out of [the last] 316 as Premier, he asked his constituents if they wanted him to tell vital visitors and potential investors in Queensland he was sorry but he had to go up to Gatton... Mr Chalk said he had turned down a \$100,000 contract spread over five years in favour of politics for which he got \$12,000 a year... he believed the Government would be returned. 'Are you going to toss its Deputy Leader out onto the street so you can have some fellow who will be a knocker everytime the Government brings something forward?' he asked. (*Courier-Mail*, 30 April 1969)

Chalk also justified his residency in Brisbane on the grounds that as Deputy Premier and Liberal leader he could not live in the electorate (*Courier-Mail*, 28 April 1969). He argued that the only reason the head of the Lockyer Area Electorate Council, Les Metcalf, had made such charges against him was that he coveted the seat. Chalk said Metcalf would like to have him 'railroaded' so he would then be in a position to try for political endorsement as a Country Party candidate for the safe rural seat—and thereby corralling the Liberals back to a metropolitan base.

Coalition difficulties were also emphasised in arguments over the state's voting system and the allocation of preferences. Initial skirmishes were fought with the Labor Party but the repercussions of the issue rebounded back on the Coalition. In March 1969, the Premier challenged Labor members from regional or country electorates to publicly repudiate the ALP's policy of 'one-vote, one-value' (*Courier-Mail*, 26 March 1969) because such a system would result in less rural representation. The challenge was meant to embarrass the ALP, but succeeded in raising the ire of the urban Liberals. The rift became public when the Liberals chose to publicly disagree with the Premier when he had defended the fairness of rural weighting in preference to a system based on all electors having votes of equal value. Prominent Liberals, such as Charles Porter (Toowong), stated that as a Liberal he was 'committed to the policy platform of one-vote, one-value' (*Courier-Mail*, 31 March 1969). The Premier became defensive on the issue, arguing that 'one vote, one value' was not Coalition policy; the Country Party did not subscribe to the principle even if it was part of official Liberal policy. Bjelke-Petersen adopted the view that the Liberals' enthusiasm for 'one vote, one value' was simply an opportunistic strategy aimed at destroying the Country Party as a political force in Queensland.

The argument over voting methods did not remain solely at the level of principle. In the campaign, a bitter preference-swap row erupted between the Coalition partners over the vexatious issue of allocating preferences on 'how-to-vote' information provided to voters. The Country Party felt strongly that three-cornered contests were detrimental to the stability of the Coalition. Alan Fletcher was reported to have blasted the idea of three-cornered polls, 'calling them a "spanner in the works" that could cause the destruction of a smooth running Coalition machine'. In the same article, Russ Hinze (CP, South Coast) insisted that he did not regard the challenge to a sitting Country Party member by a Liberal candidate as 'fair dinkum', adding 'we will be out of Government if we allow ourselves to be subjected to three-cornered contests such as this' (*Courier-Mail*, 29 April 1969). In retaliation to the challenge, Hinze directed his preferences to the ALP candidate (F. Culell) in return for ALP preferences rather than give preferences to the Liberals. This decision to exchange preferences with the ALP created an 'unseemly uproar' within the Coalition, with Hinze accused of traitorous behaviour and of intensifying friction between the Coalition partners. Chalk attacked Hinze, calling his actions 'an act of madness'. In his defence, the Premier responded by claiming the Country Party had acted with 'honour and restraint' over the Gold Coast seat, indicating that such forms of retaliation would not recur because 'I doubt that we'll again be confronted by the three-cornered election problem that brought about the preference swap this year. The experience to be gained from this three-cornered contest is obvious. These contestants [sic] are completely futile' (*Sunday Mail*, 11 May 1969). Hinze was less restrained, commenting just before the poll that the Liberal President, Eric Robinson, 'has run out of names to call me' and that Chalk 'hasn't a hope in hell of becoming Premier' (*Courier-Mail*, 16 May 1969).

In another case of retaliation through preference allocations, Alex Dewar refused to allocate his preferences to the Liberals in the Wavell electorate and instead chose to issue no preference instructions—a tactic that would 'scatter his preferences' in the event he finished third or worse in the ballot. His election pamphlets described him not as an independent but as 'Alex Dewar—the local man' (*Courier-Mail*, 11 May 1969). There was also no sign of the bitterness between the DLP and the ALP subsiding: as the state election campaign began, the DLP federal leader and ex-premier, Senator Vince Gair, steadfastly refused to give any official DLP preferences to Labor (*Courier-Mail*, 21 April 1969).

‘The moment of truth’: the final stages and election outcome

Due to the provisions of the national *Broadcasting and Television Act*, political advertising was banned in Queensland for two weeks of the campaign. A federal by-election in Perth (due to Sir Paul Hasluck retiring from the House of Representatives seat of Curtin to become Governor-General) imposed a blanket ban on media advertising in April. This was followed in early May by the Tasmanian state elections, which triggered a second ban. Both sides therefore had to contend with a disrupted on-again, off-again campaign. A total of 246 candidates stood for the 78 parliamentary seats and for the first time in decades every seat was contested.

In the final days before the poll (held on 17 May 1969), commentators disputed whether the campaign either was ‘one of the most remarkable campaigns ever conducted’ or had been a ‘colourless’ affair likely to favour the incumbents. Because policy issues generally took second place, the opposition’s Jack Houston claimed the ‘extraordinary factor in this election has been the Government Coalition’s lack of policy initiative’, adding: ‘You’d swear we were the Government putting up ideas and they were the Opposition just tagging along behind’ (*Sunday Mail*, 11 May 1969). He accused the government of missing the great men of yesterday, leaders such as Nicklin, Pizzey, Hiley and Munro. ‘They were the four big men. They kept the Government together.’ The personal attack on Bjelke-Petersen asserted that there was now a leadership vacuum in the government. The Premier had earlier made his views known on the stance of the opposition, claiming that ‘Houston was merely a mouthpiece for vicious propaganda prepared by the Party’s Queensland Central Executive’ (*Sunday Truth*, 9 March 1969). Bjelke-Petersen also believed that the

ALP has committed a grave election blunder in making foreign investment and development policies its main election attack. It’s evident that the shallow slogan ‘Give Queensland back to the People’ is one of them—having been conceived by unthinking doctrinaire socialists sitting behind closed doors in Brisbane, paying no attention to the true thoughts of the Queensland People. (*Sunday Truth*, 9 March 1969)

On the eve of the election, Bjelke-Petersen wrote a further newspaper article in which he stated:

The Labor Party in Queensland is so dominated by left-wing elements that even the Australian Workers’ Union, the most powerful union in Australia, has withdrawn financial support of the ALP. Surely this is

condemnation enough when unions, which traditionally support the ALP, withdraw their support on the eve of the election. (*Telegraph*, 16 May 1969)

The Premier also made a sideswipe at the Liberals, who had been claiming that they were largely responsible for the high rates of economic development, saying that the Country Party had been responsible mainly for attracting investors and championing industrial and mining projects. Bjelke-Petersen especially mentioned the efforts of two ministers—the former Mines Minister, Ernie Evans, and his successor, Ron Camm—for having ‘vision’ and drive and for giving ‘the incentive for an unprecedented in-flow of money and men which led to the discovery of oil at Moonie and later natural gas at Roma’. He also cited his own contribution as Works and Housing Minister, for ‘obtaining homes for workers engaged in new large industrial undertakings’. Evoking the memories of past greatness, he recalled:

[A]ll of this had happened under Country Party Premiers like Sir Francis Nicklin and the late Jack Pizzey. Down through the years many prominent Country Party members had left their mark in the State and federal spheres of Government. They were men of broad vision and understanding and had ably represented the Country Party which was a true middle of the road party. (*Courier-Mail*, 16 May 1969)

The Premier was in no doubt that the 1969 election represented an electoral struggle on two fronts: between the Coalition and Labor for overall supremacy and the right to form government and between the Country and Liberal Parties for the right to lead the government, hold the most influence and claim the top positions. As the day of the election approached, he was reasonably confident he would win on both fronts and publicly predicted only days before the poll that his government would be returned. This was a rare moment of self-confidence from a Premier under intense political pressure from all sides.

As the votes came in, the Premier’s prediction proved accurate. Overall, the two-party preferred vote was almost identical to the 1966 result, with 52.3 per cent to the Coalition and 47.7 per cent to Labor. The Coalition secured 45 seats in the 78-seat Chamber—down by two from the 1966 result but still a comfortable majority of 12 on the floor of the Assembly. The ALP had gained five seats, mostly at the expense of independents, and held Isis, taking its numbers in the House from 26 to 31. The Liberals lost two seats but regained one (Wavell), leaving them with 19 seats in the new Parliament—down from the 20 they had held previously. The Country Party retained the same number of seats it had held in the previous Parliament (26), losing Isis again but winning one (Burdekin) to make up its numbers. Les Diplock, the DLP’s sole member in the Assembly, retained his seat of Aubigny, and the last-remaining independent, Tom Aikens

(labelling himself as the North Queensland Labor Party, NQLP), again held on to Townsville South. The state of the parties in the new Parliament was thus: Country Party, 26; Liberals, 19; ALP, 31; DLP, 1; and NQLP-independent, 1.

The election was, however, closer than at first it appeared. The primary votes cast for the Coalition and Labor were almost identical. On a state-wide basis, the Coalition received a primary vote of 44.7 per cent (virtually identical to its level of support in each election since 1957). With 44.7 per cent of the vote, the Coalition gained 57.7 per cent of the seats. Labor attracted a primary vote of 44.99 per cent of the vote but received only 39.7 per cent of the seats. The DLP achieved 7.24 per cent of the votes on a state-wide basis, which was a slight improvement on the two previous elections, but this translated into only one seat or 1.28 per cent of the available seats.

With the large number of resignations from the former Parliament and some members defeated at the polls, a total of 16 new members entered the Parliament. Among the more notable newcomers was Selwyn Muller, the son of the former Country Party minister Alf Muller, and eventually to become Speaker of the Assembly. On the Labor side the more noteworthy members elected included Keith Wright (Rockhampton South) and Ed Casey (Mackay), both of whom would later become parliamentary leaders of their party. Neither man made it to Premier but Casey would become a minister in the Goss government and Wright, who quit state politics in 1984, would serve in the Commonwealth Parliament before serving time in jail for sex crimes. For the first time in the Queensland Assembly, identical twins were elected as members. Both were Labor Party members but represented electorates at opposite ends of the state: Peter Wood (ALP, Toowoomba East) was first elected in 1966, while his twin, Bill Wood (ALP, Cook), was elected in 1969. One newspaper report looking for an angle claimed the event was unique among parliaments in the British Commonwealth and predicted the twins would pose a 'worry for the Speaker' in telling them apart!

Alex Dewar, the former Liberal minister for Labour and Industry, who had resigned from the Liberal Party to become an independent for the last year of his parliamentary term, was unsuccessful in his attempt to retain his seat of Wavell. So bitter was he towards his former colleagues that during the campaign he had defied the Liberal Party to defeat him. The Liberals enjoyed the last laugh when Dewar finished third with 25.4 per cent of the vote—behind the Labor and the Liberal candidates. The Liberal candidate, Dr Arthur Crawford, defeated Labor's Herbert Bromley (the brother of Fred Bromley) with 54.7 per cent of the two-party preferred vote.

Reaction to the result of 1969 was mixed. For the government, the result virtually maintained the status quo. They were back in government and the victory

provided a temporary affirmation of Bjelke-Petersen's leadership as Premier and leader of the Country Party; his better than expected performance kept his detractors inside the party at bay. The Liberals again outpolled the Country Party (this time by 23.7 per cent to 21 per cent) but they were disappointed they had not made greater inroads into the Country Party's seat majority. Labor was again consigned to opposition, pleased to hold five additional seats, but becoming restless and resentful as the years in opposition began to stretch out. The party's support for Houston as parliamentary leader was maintained due largely to his impressive performance in the campaign and Labor's improved position after the election, but also to the fact that no obvious successor was yet apparent. After the election, Tom Burns, the ALP's state secretary, offered a 'hand of friendship' to the Liberals, claiming Labor would vote with the Liberals to introduce a fair election system—a gesture that was rejected by Chalk, who said he had no truck with Labor and did not want any (*AJPH* 1969:vol. 15, no. 3, p. 102).

Shortly after the election, however, the government was forced to fight a by-election in the seat of Albert after the unexpected death of Cecil Carey. First elected in May 1960, Carey had held the largely rural seat of Albert for the Country Party until suffering a fatal stroke on 26 December 1969. He had won the seat in 1969 with an absolute majority of the primary vote. The by-election called for 14 February 1970 again saw a three-cornered contest between the major parties. A 'young goer', Don Beck (a thirty-three-year-old businessman), was endorsed as the Country Party's candidate. The Liberals ran the forty-nine-year-old William (Bill) Heatley (a former Liberal senator for Queensland, 1966–68) and trawler fleet operator. Labor preselected a young school principal, Bill D'Arcy (then just thirty years old), who would later rise to become Labor's deputy leader before falling from grace and being charged with paedophilia 28 years later. An independent, Eric Nunn, also stood. On the primary vote alone, the Liberal candidate nosed just ahead of the Country Party to claim second position overall by a mere 79 primary votes. Heatley won 3899 votes to Beck's 3820. Nunn finished last with 416 votes (2.91 per cent) but allocated his preferences to the Liberals. Although Labor won the primary vote with 6143 votes (43.02 per cent), it lost after a distribution of preferences, as Table 8.1 indicates.

Table 8.1 The result of the by-election for Albert, 1969

Name	Party	Primary vote	Second count (%)	Third count (%)	Total (%)
Eric Nunn	Ind.	416			
Don Beck	CP	3 820	47 (11.30)		
Bill D'Arcy	ALP	6 143	131 (31.49)	798 (20.64)	7 072 (49.53)
Bill Heatley	Lib.	3 899	238 (57.21)	3 069 (79.36)	7 206 (50.47)

Heatley narrowly won the seat by 134 votes ahead of D’Arcy. Newspaper speculation before the by-election had warned that the leadership of the government would rest on the poll result. Commentators believed the by-election was more about a confidence vote in the Premier than it was a local contest between the candidates (*Courier-Mail*, 5 February 1970). Their speculation was most prescient.

Surprisingly, Heatley would not hold Albert for long, remaining an MLA for just more than 20 months. Ironically, for a man who had twice attained political office through the death of a former member (first inheriting a senate vacancy from Bob Sherrington, then Carey’s former seat in the Assembly), Heatley himself—a heavy drinker—died on 29 October 1971. The seat was then not filled until the next general election (leaving it vacant for seven months), when it was eventually claimed by Bill D’Arcy for Labor.

Conclusion

Later representations of Bjelke-Petersen’s style of government highlight his strength of character and his rugged determination in office. During the 19 years of his premiership, he gained notoriety for his toughness, his commitment to win political fights and his unorthodox ways of doing business. He generally became portrayed as an astute strategist who was ruthless and sometimes vindictive to his opponents, both across the political divide and within his own side of politics. He was later to assume an almost mythical status in political folklore and among his supporters was considered to possess many ‘larger-than-life’ qualities. Populist images of the idiosyncratic Premier gradually came to characterise not only his government but the nature of politics in Queensland. His penchant for controversial statements provided a regular diet of ‘good copy’ to the eagerly awaiting ‘chooks’ of the media. He was also a convenient target of ridicule for cartoonists, satirists and impersonators.

Certainly, within a decade of becoming Premier, he was an unrivalled champion of the right not just in Queensland but throughout Australia. He would later attract a following and a loyalty among colleagues and sections of the public that would stand the test of time. Those avid supporters who later became known as the ‘Friends of Joh’ placed an unshakeable faith in the Premier, irrespective of any charges or criticisms his accusers could level. To these supporters, he was a man surrounded by enemies who had become a beacon for the conservative cause. Others, however, saw him differently. To his detractors, he was a demagogue with a mean streak who was prepared to use state power to achieve whatever immediate ends were uppermost on his agenda. Bjelke-Petersen was certainly a paradox, not only because his ‘country-bumpkin’ ordinariness

was combined with an intensity and Machiavellian complexity, but because he skilfully managed to translate those characteristics into enduring political success.

There are, however, two other sides of Bjelke-Petersen as a political leader that are generally less acknowledged in popular accounts of his premiership but which are evident from his early years in the position. First, his sense of accountability was not well developed and his understanding of responsible government was at best partial. To him, governments were there to get on with the job (or get out of the way of private interests) and he tended to see the Parliament as an imposition on or impediment to strong executive government. He was never committed to notions of parliamentary sovereignty or to the conventions of parliamentary democracy. His relations with the Parliament were at best grudging and, like the Labor governments before him, he worked from the principle that state politics was a 'winner-take-all' system. There is evidence, however, that he was more open and trusting in his early years in the Parliament but became more withdrawn and circumspect as his political attackers made capital from his predicaments.

Second, while he is subsequently remembered as a decisive and uncompromising leader, in his early years in the Premiership he was often unsure of direction, ambivalent and fickle in his decision making. Initially, it is clear that he lacked confidence and seemed awkward with the media until he had an image 'makeover' and had his performances coached. His premiership did not appear initially to offer much promise and many even among his own party saw him as a stopgap leader who would make way for someone younger and more adventurous (such as Ron Camm). History, however, indicates how wrong initial impressions can be. Bjelke-Petersen certainly did not regard himself as a stopgap figure and, as opposition to his premiership grew, he strenuously fought to retain the top job; and once that fight was over, he would remain virtually unchallenged as leader for another 15 years.