

9. The slide towards uncertainty, 1969–1972

The Parliament resumed after a break of seven and a half months—a relatively long intermission but by no means unusual in those days. When an election was due in the new year (from March to June), it was common practice for the Parliament to adjourn in late November or early December (before Christmas) and to not reconvene for another six to eight months. This was the pattern followed throughout the 1940s to the mid-1950s and again from 1962 to 1972. The thirty-ninth Parliament would run from 5 August 1969 to 10 December 1971 (202 sitting days in the three-year term or 67 days a year) and not meet again before the May 1972 election. It was the last Parliament to meet with 78 members and, for the first time since winning government, the Coalition governed with a reduced majority. Under Nicklin, the Coalition's majority had risen from nine in 1957 to 10 in 1960, to 14 in 1963 and 16 in 1966, but fell back to just 12 after the 1969 election—Bjelke-Petersen's first electoral test as leader. With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear the 1969–72 Parliament was to become Labor's high-water mark in its period in opposition, when for a few years it posed a credible challenge to the government. It was also a period when the Premier was at his most vulnerable politically—a condition deeply troubling to his own party colleagues, who would eventually be incited to rebel against his leadership.

'To drive home the supremacy'

Bjelke-Petersen's second ministry was sworn in on 29 May 1969. The initial ministry of 13 preserved the seven–six balance of power between the Country Party and the Liberals. The former Minister for Public Works, Local Government and Conservation, Harold Richter (CP, Somerset), indicated he no longer wished to be part of the ministry and was then knighted and replaced by Neville Hewitt (CP, Mackenzie), who had had quite a considerable wait to reach the frontbench. The full ministry consisted of

- Premier and Minister for State Development: Johannes 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 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: Fred Campbell, Lib.
- Minister for Lands: Victor Sullivan, CP
- Minister for Works and Housing: Max Hodges, CP
- Minister for Local Government and Marine Activities: Neville Hewitt, CP

Within a matter of months, however, the second ministry was amended significantly. On 20 August, the Premier introduced an amendment to the *Officials in Parliament Act 1896–1968*, seeking to increase the number of ministers from 13 to 14. The official reasons for the increase in the ministry were the growth rate of Queensland, the higher workload on ministers and the decentralised nature of the state, coupled with the fact that ‘ministers have made themselves more and more accessible to the people generally’ (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 104). During an unusually protracted first reading debate, Bjelke-Petersen did not indicate directly in the Parliament that he would be appointing an additional Country Party minister (although he had suggested this outside the House) and opposition members speculated on who the new minister might be. Predictably, Labor opposed the move, claiming Bjelke-Petersen was ‘empire-building’, that Queensland had too many ministers compared with other states and arguing that the money could be better spent on improving facilities for the opposition. Both the Leader of the Opposition, Jack Houston, and his deputy, Percy Tucker, implied that the additional portfolio was being created to ‘give dominance to the Country Party in Cabinet’ (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 106). Tucker added:

If the Country Party keeps on as it is going, it will have more chiefs than Indians. The Country Party receives only 21 per cent of the votes of the people of Queensland yet it dominates the coalition Government. If this measure is passed the Country Party will have an additional Minister to help it dominate the coalition. Surely the Leader of the Liberal Party can see what is happening... The Liberal Party must know that it is designed to give the Country Party more freedom in Cabinet. (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, pp. 112–13)

In total, six Labor members spoke against the bill in the first reading (Houston and Tucker plus Hughie O’Donnell, Jack Melloy, Doug Sherrington and Peter Wood), with Sherrington insisting that the move was ‘designed for one purpose only, that is, to drive home the supremacy of the Country Party in this Government’ (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 118). Believing that Bjelke-Petersen had deliberately begun to cultivate his image as a ‘strong’ premier, Sherrington

was quick to criticise this engineered transformation. He suggested that Gordon Chalk had more stature and had earned the reputation as the government's strongman. Sherrington then reminded members that the Liberals had urged Chalk to remain Premier in the week after Pizzey's death. According to Sherrington, Bjelke-Petersen felt Chalk was looking over his shoulder, so needed to change popular perceptions. Sherrington told the Parliament: 'It was evident to everybody connected with politics that, right through the election campaign, the Premier, through his Press relations officers, and particularly through his column in *Sunday Truth*, had to prove that he was the strong man of Cabinet' (QPD 1969:vol. 251, pp. 118–19).

Then, with some prescience of mind, Sherrington added:

There was a time when I admired the Premier for being a man of integrity. However, I believe that since he has become Premier, and because he has been forced into having to prove himself as a strong person, he has descended on many occasions to launching any type of attack that he chooses. (QPD 1969:vol. 251, pp. 118–19)

In the debate, only the Premier and his Liberal deputy spoke in favour of the amendment to increase the size of the ministry. With his final remarks, the Premier indicated the bill had the full support of the cabinet, which effectively locked-in Liberal support for the amendment. In the second reading speeches, many of the same protagonists repeated identical points, but this time with Charles Porter (Lib., Toowong) and Treasurer Chalk replying to the opposition's criticisms.¹ Chalk, in particular, denied that the increase was designed to give the Country Party control in cabinet. He argued that only *one* additional minister was needed (rather than two—that is, one each) and that the bill had been discussed in cabinet and within the Liberal Party (which he argued supported the idea). He volunteered:

At Cabinet meetings every Minister looks at matters not on a party-political basis between the two arms of the coalition but on the basis of what is best for Queensland. There is no such thing as a majority in Cabinet meetings...In my whole time in Cabinet I have not seen one vote taken. (QPD 1969:vol. 251, p. 252)

¹ Jack Houston also accused the Bjelke-Petersen cabinet of being internally divided. In reply to the Premier's comments that the opposition did not know what went on in cabinet (especially about votes on contentious issues in cabinet), he said: 'I remember that some time ago in this House we heard an entirely different story. It related to the chiropractors' legislation, on which the Cabinet was so divided that, when the numbers were counted, it was decided that there should be a free vote on the matter in this Chamber. Surely the Government will not suggest that every Cabinet decision is unanimous' (QPD 1969:vol. 251, p. 243).

The first reading of the bill was passed by a vote of 41 to 29 after nearly three hours of bickering. On 27 August, the bill was carried at its shorter second reading by 40 to 31 votes and declared read a third time without debate or vote.

As predicted, a further Country Party minister was appointed in September, resulting in a minor reshuffle of portfolios. In the reallocation, Ron Camm—still considered a rival to the Premier—was stripped of responsibility for the electricity industry and returned to his previous portfolio responsibilities for Mines and Main Roads. Neville Hewitt lost Local Government and was given instead responsibility for a new portfolio of Conservation, Marine and Aboriginal Affairs. And the ministerial newcomer, Wallace Rae (CP, Gregory), from the far west of the state, was appointed Minister for Local Government and Electricity. Rae had developed a reputation as a politician who had ‘at times risked his political career to speak out for his people’ (*Courier-Mail*, 4 September 1969). Importantly, the addition of Rae to the ministry represented a major departure from the conventions established by Nicklin in 1957. The relativity between the Coalition parties in cabinet was now changed to eight to six in the Country Party’s favour.

The real reasons underlying the Premier’s pre-emptive action are open to speculation. Certainly, the decision allowed the Premier to enhance his personal support within his own party while allowing him to trim the influence of Camm. It also allowed him to reinforce his leadership credentials vis-a-vis Chalk. Moreover, the fact that the Country Party had not lost a seat in the 1969 election, whereas the Liberals had lost one, could also have been a factor in the Premier’s decision (but perhaps less plausibly given that the announcement was made in September and not in May). Behind the scenes, the Premier’s quest ‘to drive home the supremacy’ of the majority party was resented by some sections of the Liberal Party, but at the time its resentment was to no avail. Gradually, however, such manifest signals of its junior status fed into its growing disenchantment with its senior coalition partners.

On party lines: Nicholson’s fourth term as Speaker

With the inability of the Administrator, the Senior Puisne Judge Joseph Sheehy, to attend the opening ceremony of the Parliament, three commissioners were appointed to conduct the return of the writs, the swearing in of members and the election of the Speaker. Bjelke-Petersen nominated the former Speaker, David Nicholson, to reoccupy the position, commenting that he ‘conducts himself with dignity, ability and fairness to all’ (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 3). Treasurer Chalk seconded Nicholson’s nomination. The Opposition Leader,

Jack Houston, accused the government of politicising the office of Speaker and of being so indifferent to the office that they merely repeated the nomination speeches made by Jack Pizzey and Chalk three years earlier. In nominating Hughie O'Donnell (ALP, Barcoo) as the opposition's choice for Speaker, Houston spoke for more than half an hour. He complained about the mismanagement of the House under Nicholson, especially the favouring of government members, the cramped conditions for the opposition and the failure to allow the Standing Orders Committee to meet for more than three years. Percy Tucker, the Deputy Opposition Leader, seconded Labor's nomination. The outspoken member for Townsville South, Tom Aikens (NQP), attacked both sides for their hypocrisy. He argued that there was a lot of 'pulling shirt-tails, blowing down ears and working rackets with regard to the appointment of officers of this House' (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 9). Speaking for almost an hour, Aikens told the members that Nicholson had made many mistakes when he first became Speaker, but 'like good whisky, he improved with age' (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 10). He then launched into a diatribe against free speech, university students, the 'Brian Laver group', erotica, pornography, as well as communists, members of Trades Hall and 'all the other political riff-raff' around. At one stage, he warned the sole female Member of Parliament, Vi Jordan (ALP, Ipswich West), that she had 'no right to hide behind her sex in order to dodge her responsibilities' as a legislator and should she seek to do so 'she should either leave Parliament or change her sex'. This threat was issued not because of anything Jordan had said or done but because Aikens was tempted to read extracts from an erotic publication he thought she should not hear. The whole speech was a typical spray of vituperation, more suitable for the front bar of a local pub than the Parliament.

In the ballot for the Speakership, the vote went on party lines. Nicholson received 45 votes to O'Donnell's 31 votes, with one informal vote cast (Tom Aikens) and one member not voting. Bjelke-Petersen offered the government's congratulations, claiming—without the slightest trace of irony—that because Nicholson maintained 'a very high standard in the conduct of business in this House', 'we in Queensland have gained a reputation that is the envy of other Parliaments' (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 15). Houston also congratulated the Speaker on behalf of the opposition. Accepting the position, Nicholson (who had been Speaker since August 1963) stated:

If this were the House of Commons following the vote which has just been taken I could, of course, no longer occupy the chair, because there it is thought that the Speaker should resign if he has lost the confidence of all, or even some, members. Here, of course, the position is entirely different. In Australia, Speakers are in rather an unfortunate situation. I well remember that when I was elected in 1966 the then Leader of the Opposition, Mr Duggan, also expressed the view that it is unfortunate

that a Speaker has to be nominated and still has to retain his party membership. I believe that on that occasion I replied that I would be very happy to resign my party affiliation as long as the Opposition also entered into an agreement not to play politics with the Chair and did not compete against me in the election. That is the right of Speakers not only in the House of Commons but in many other Parliaments. (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, pp. 15–16)

Nicholson then indicated that his acceptance speech was ‘possibly the only opportunity I will have to speak my mind, and speak it I will, no matter how long it takes’. He castigated the opposition for ‘a spate of untruths’ and trying to ‘forget the past’. Faced with interjections and issuing threats to expel members opposite, Nicholson acknowledged the level of office space provided to members was ‘not in accordance with my desires’. He indicated that he had not wished to allocate three to four members to a room or locate a similar number in ‘The Lodge’² (but added that ‘this is the only Parliament in the Commonwealth in which members are even provided with a bed’) (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 16). He finished his speech by praising the government for refurbishing the House with ‘over \$500,000 spent on Parliament House since a Country–Liberal Government first came to office’. There was now a ‘desk for every Member of Parliament and a telephone on each desk’. And although 15 Labor members shared a single room, this was, according to Nicholson, not as bad as when he ‘first entered Parliament [when] there were 15 Country party members in a room 25 feet by 15 feet. It contained one table and two telephones and not enough chairs for the 15 members to sit on.’ He concluded in a frank manner by reflecting:

I realise this is a democratic world and while we have a system of politics where the election of Speaker is based on a political plane, as it was today, then it is a difficult job for any occupant of the chair, irrespective of his political affiliations, to convince the people that he is being impartial. And that will continue, irrespective of who occupies the chair. That doubt will always remain while the election of Speaker is conducted on a political basis. (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, pp. 16–17)

Nicholson would go on during the thirty-ninth Parliament to become the longest-serving Speaker of the Legislative Assembly (a record term of 11 years and nine months—still unsurpassed to this date). His achievement was recognised on the

2 The Parliamentary Lodge was a timber boarding house located next to the Provodore’s Cottage at the end of the ministerial wing of the parliamentary buildings on Alice Street, running towards the river. It was demolished to be replaced with the Parliamentary Annexe in 1973. The Lodge was often the subject of criticism from members. Ray Jones (ALP, Cairns) complained that he was unable to perform his parliamentary duties adequately because ‘when I return to The Lodge, unless I get to bed and to sleep before my two room-mates, I spend hours lying awake listening to their snoring. Three of us share one room, and their beds are nearly as close to mine as are the tables in the office that I share with other members’ (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 541).

appropriate day (15 October 1970) in a Ministerial Statement by the Premier. In the statement, Bjelke-Petersen described Nicholson as having ‘displayed all the attributes of a great Speaker’ (*QPD* 1970:vol. 254, p. 1072).

The Administrator’s opening speech to the first session delivered on 6 August 1969 in the former Legislative Council chamber noted that the Governor had represented Queensland at the investiture of the Prince of Wales in July. He mentioned that state finances would ‘face a number of difficulties’ because of drought and higher pay for government employees. New land was being cleared, new dams and irrigation schemes were under construction, regional sewerage works were approved, new roads and tunnels built, new harbours and jetties were planned, a new prison was forthcoming and other public works were announced. The government noted that the Attorney-General had received the first report of the Law Reform Commission of Queensland. Interestingly, among the new bills to be presented to the Parliament was one to impose death duties. The Death Duties Assessment Bill provided ‘for the imposition, assessment and collection of duties upon the estates of deceased persons in place of the existing scheme which is based upon the succession of a beneficiary to property’ (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 20). The government also announced it intended to introduce a bill to ‘regulate the marketing of processed packaged chickens to protect the consumer from an excess water content’ (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 20). Nothing, apparently, was too banal or insignificant for the head of state to itemise.

The Speaker also announced the appointment of the new Clerk of the Parliament, William Johnson, who had served as Clerk-Assistant and Sergeant-at-Arms under the previous Clerk, Roy Dunlop, who had retired on 31 December 1968. Johnson had formally begun his duties as clerk on 1 January 1969 and was due to be sworn in officially once the Parliament met; as chance would have it, he was absent on the day through illness. His deputy, Cyril George, took the oath of allegiance on 7 August, while Johnson was eventually sworn in on 2 September 1969. Johnson’s term as clerk was to be short-lived as he suffered a major heart attack the next year and died on 19 August 1970. Johnson’s initial appointment as Clerk-Assistant (back in 1954) had been somewhat controversial as he was accused of being a political appointment. Johnson had a background in Labor and trade union politics and had been appointed by the Hanlon Labor government to the Land Court. The Labor Premier, Vince Gair, then appointed him to the deputy clerk’s position (in conventional practice becoming the next designate for the top job) and elevated him above Cyril George in seniority. He was also believed to have been a close personal acquaintance of Gair.

The Parliament noted the death of Sir James Heading, a member for 13 years and former Minister for Public Works and Local Government in the first Nicklin government (1957–60) (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 23). Also noted was the passing

away of William Dart, a former member (1938–44) and one of the original aldermen of Greater Brisbane. Heading's career was typical of the Country Party members of his generation. As the Premier reminded the House:

The late Sir James Heading came from Victoria as a young man to the South Burnett and settled in the Murgon district at a time when land was being thrown open for closer settlement. He became one of the district's most successful farmers and was a noted stud breeder of Australian Illawarra cattle and Large White pigs. For more than half a century he was an active supporter of agricultural shows...He was chairman of the Murgon Show Society for many years, became a councillor of the Royal National Agricultural Association in 1940, and was that association's president from 1951 to 1955. Before the outbreak of World War I Sir James had become chairman of the Murgon Shire Council. He served with distinction in that conflict, in the 47th and 45th Battalions, and was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal and the Military Medal...He devoted much energy to the promotion of primary producer organisations for many years...[and] was not averse to change when new methods meant increased efficiency, and his progressive and dynamic approach to all problems stamped him as a leader in advancing the interests of primary producers generally. He was a great man, who contributed so much to the benefit of many people in this State. (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 24)

After the condolence motion, the Speaker had to warn members engaged 'inappropriately in audible conversations'—some of whom were apt to 'move about the Chamber, retire from the Chamber, and re-enter it' during the condolence debate. The Speaker ruled that this was disrespectful and undesirable. When the long-serving independent member Arthur Coburn died later that month (21 August 1969), the Speaker did not have to warn members. Eulogies from the Premier, Opposition Leader and Tom Aikens all recalled his earnestness and dedication to the Parliament and community (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, pp. 190–2).

As was customary, two new members from the government's side initiated the Address-in-Reply debate. In 1969, the debate was opened by Harold Hungerford (CP, Balonne) and Dr Arthur Crawford (Lib., Wavell). While Hungerford's address was rich in hyperbole (but included one of the few mentions of the Vietnam War in the Assembly when *en passant* he prayed that the war will 'soon come to fruition'), Crawford launched into a passionate plea for new health legislation, new structures of health care, better health management and reforms to hospitals and nursing. His speech ended with a call to repeal the present health legislation, arguing that 'reform is imperative' (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 36). Crawford's attack placed him offside with the government and, as one of the Liberal 'ginger

group', he never made it into the ministry before he retired in 1977 over the lack of political leadership and policy follow-through in the Liberal Party. His 1969 Address-in-Reply outburst was sufficient, however, to force Russ Hinze (CP, South Coast) to opine that 'after he gets a few spots knocked off him' he would become a 'valuable member of the Government because he has indicated that he is prepared to say what he thinks' (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 142).

Parliament a 'sham show'? Complaints about the lack of openness

With the resumption of parliamentary business, Labor raised questions about potential offshore oil spillages on the Great Barrier Reef. This was after a major blow-out (or spill) had occurred in the Santa Barbara Channel off California causing environmental damage. Initially, the Mines Minister, Ron Camm, presented a series of partial answers prepared by departmental officers providing some, but by no means all, requested information. Later, he informed the Parliament that although the government had been granting permits to drill for oil offshore close to the Great Barrier Reef, it had decided to suspend any new exploration permits until further safety requirements were met by industry (without repudiating any existing agreements). Camm argued that 'drilling is an essential step in finding deposits of petroleum, so all rights to explore for petroleum include the right to drill' and that any repudiation of agreements (under the *Petroleum [Submerged Lands] Act 1967*) would be unacceptable. He told the House: 'This Government will not repudiate any agreement that it has entered into. Repudiation would cause a world-wide loss of confidence in the integrity of the Government of Queensland, resulting in a drying up of capital for investment in the State and a flight of capital from the State' (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 65).

Labor was clearly unhappy with Camm's statement but in those days it was unable to formally respond to ministerial statements. Opposition members were determined not to allow the issue to disappear and repeatedly came back with questions and allegations. A similar issue that escaped parliamentary notice in late 1971 was the negotiation between the Queensland and federal governments over proposals to establish a uranium-enrichment facility in the state. Both governments were supportive of establishing an enrichment plant but the Prime Minister, William McMahon, 'stated it is not intended to give any publicity to the proposed studies' (*Queensland Cabinet Submission* no. 14908). The government was more successful in keeping this issue under wraps.

Nicholson was sometimes partial in disallowing opposition questions on notice, giving various reasons for why he would not 'call' proposed questions so they

headlines that the Premier possessed ‘feet of clay’ for capitulating to Canberra. Medical matters also featured prominently in legislation in 1969 and 1970—especially over the *Medical Act Amendment Act 1969*, the *Chiropodists Act 1969*, the *Medical Act and Other Acts (Administration) Act Amendment Act 1969* (to restructure the medical boards) and the *Queensland Institute of Medical Research Act Amendment Act 1969*, the *Radioactive Substances Act Amendment Act 1970* and amendments to the *Children’s Services Act* to allow medical examinations for children in care and protection. Vi Jordan (ALP, Ipswich West) advocated increased spending on child care in order that women could play a greater role in the workforce. She also lamented the ‘increasing number of deserted wives and the fast-increasing number of young unmarried mothers’ (QPD 1969:vol. 251, p. 926). The main topic of debate on law and order was the pending appointment of a new police commissioner.⁷ The government was accused of procrastinating over police reform, at one stage admitting to inviting the South Australian Commissioner of Police to ‘advise us on how to run our Force’ (QPD 1969:vol. 251, p. 740). Col Bennett also accused the government of politicising the office of Commissioner of Police by arranging for the outgoing Commissioner, Norm Bauer, to address a rally organised by the Young Australian Country Party (QPD 1969:vol. 251, pp. 766–7).

Adversarial attacks were common, as were personal attacks on other members and their respective party organisations. Martin Hanson (ALP, Port Curtis) accused the Mines Minister, Ron Camm, of getting his promotion to the executive ‘by putting sugar in the Premier’s tea’. He also attacked a Liberal sympathiser and publicist for Queensland Breweries, ‘Mr [Hugh] Bingham’, who had campaigned for the Liberals’ Peter Nelson-Gracie in the Landsborough by-election, but had now gone to work for the Country Party as a consultant. Hanson maintained that ‘politics breeds strange bedfellows’ because the Premier, ‘who told this Parliament that drink was a “twin evil” is now jaunting around the State with a brewery publicist’ (QPD 1969:vol. 251, p. 507). Hanson’s claims were not disputed, implying that Bjelke-Petersen had already realised he needed a publicist and press adviser before he more famously engaged Allen Callaghan in 1971.

In his penultimate speech before his sudden death, Cecil Carey (CP, Albert) even went so far as to threaten opposition members who used their maiden speeches to have a go at the government. He warned them that, while maiden speeches conventionally allowed members the opportunity to criticise their political opponents without fear of interjection, once completed the gloves were off. ‘I say to those hon. members who have made their first speech, “You have had your day. From now on we will be at you”’ (QPD 1969:vol. 251, p. 412). Other

⁷ Initially Norm Bauer, who was nearing retirement, was appointed during 1969–70 and then the reforming Ray Whitrod was made commissioner in 1970—and survived in the post until 1976.

members became perennial mutual antagonists. For example, Col Bennett (ALP, South Brisbane) and Tom Aikens (Ind., Townsville South) had regular stoushes, with Aikens accusing Bennett of prostituting his position as a politician and being the ‘worst of the lot’, while Bennett called Aikens a ‘mushroom of the Tory Government’—kept in the dark, fed on ‘bull’, ‘and he cops the lot and is very happy provided he is doing what they tell him to do’ (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 573). Aikens retorted that Bennett lacked ‘a fair amount of native intelligence’ and deliberately provoked the Speaker only to catch the eye of the press gallery and ‘get headlines in the Press tomorrow’ (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 576). Never in the field of human conflict was so much love *never* lost by so few!

Occasionally, attacks extended to political actors outside the Parliament, and unionists were fair game. In September 1969, Bill Lonergan (CP, Flinders)—nicknamed ‘Bugger’em Bill’ because of his habit of throwing correspondence and files on the floor and saying ‘Ah! Bugger’em’—asked the Justice Minister why a drink-driving charge against the TLC President and ALP President, Jack Egerton, was delayed. The minister answered that Egerton had been arrested and charged but had pleaded not guilty in the Magistrate’s Court. The date set for the hearing (11 September) coincided with an Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) conference and an adjournment was agreed until December of that year. Jim Houghton (CP, Redcliffe), who described himself as an ‘old rabid Tory’, was also fond of accusing Labor parliamentarians of an overly close ‘affinity with the boys from Trades Hall who are professed communists’. He sprinkled his attack with statements such as ‘he who lies in the gutter with dogs gets fleas’ (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 885).

Others could be more introspective of the changing nature of parliamentarians. Pat Hanlon (1956–74), who would survive to become the last member of the Gair Labor government of 1957, recounted to the new Parliament:

When one looks through the list of those who retired and those who passed on in the last three years, one sees a remarkable combination of colour, character, and—not the least—controversy by which those members, through their contributions for perhaps a generation, made this Parliament a vital institution in this State...The biggest difference today is in the environment of Parliament itself. Most members will recall that Mr Duggan, who is now retired, said towards the end of last session that he regretted that much of the colour and the atmosphere that had pervaded the Chamber during most of his time as a member did not seem today to exist to the same extent. The hon. member for Logan referred to the fact that Parliament should keep in mind whether it is in danger of becoming regarded by a great percentage of the population, particularly the younger generation, as something of an irrelevancy, an old curiosity place, a ‘talk shop’, which does not have the importance

that it once had in our democratic system. That it should be regarded... as an old curiosity rather than as the living, breathing institution it should be, is a matter that must concern members of this House and the public alike. It is true that this Parliament, in the heyday of Mr Duggan, Mr Mann, Mr Walsh, Mr Alf Muller and others who are now retired, was a place of confrontation on issues that affected the life of the people of the day, confrontation that was duly reported to the people through the news media, which essentially were the newspapers of the day. Now, with the change of media, particularly television, that confrontation appears to have moved more and more from this Chamber into the media, so that instead of the news media reporting to the public the ultimate discussions of these issues where they might be altered, that is, in this Assembly, the discussion is actually transferring itself discernibly to the media—television and the columns of the press...we have to watch and be careful that the media, in all aspects, do not become more important than the decision-making in this Parliament. (QPD 1969:vol. 251, p. 528)

Technology and news management were becoming increasingly influential to how the Parliament operated.

Ruckuses over the reef and the concrete jungle over the Brisbane River

One of Labor's most important *cause célèbres* was the drilling for oil on the Great Barrier Reef. The issue recurred frequently, partly because of the significance of the decisions and partly because Labor sensed it had great community support. Showing some reluctance, the government was forced to provide detailed information on specific applications and drilling sites (although rarely did anyone from the government benches take part in the debate except for the Mines Minister). Labor members accused Treasurer Chalk of having secret negotiations with the Prime Minister, John Gorton, at the Liberal Party conference in Toowoomba in mid-1969. While Labor was supportive of industrial decentralisation and regional development, the party was adamantly against oil drilling on the Great Barrier Reef. Various tactics were used to extract information. Labor's parliamentary whip, Horace Davies, painted an apocryphal picture of the Prime Minister's visit:

We can well imagine their sitting around the coffee or tea table and Mr Gorton saying to our Treasurer, and the Premier, if he was there, 'Well, a Federal election is looming; evidently there is great indignation on the Queensland coastline about what is going to happen to the wonderful reef. I did not say anything during the State election campaign, but

personally I am against these developments; I believe the reef should be preserved. A federal election is coming up and the electorates of Herbert, Capricornia and Dawson must be considered'...Mr Gorton made his statement against drilling on the Barrier Reef, but where was he during the last State election when this matter was of great concern in the North and South of Queensland? If the Prime Minister has such a vital interest in our reef waters why did he fail then to express his opinions on the policy of the Queensland Government, and to try to influence the Queensland Government in this matter? (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 211)

During the next months, Labor fielded a series of questions about oil exploration, offshore exploration permits, the process of issuing permits and the environmental protection measures taken. Some questions were simply fishing exercises because little hard information was to hand. These questions were designed to flush out the government's intentions and actions to date. Mines Minister Camm confirmed that 11 exploration permits had been issued (or 'transitioned') for six years from the date granted (either 1 September or 1 October 1968). Applications had been sought through notice in the *Government Gazette* on 5 October 1968. At other times, when Labor members questioned whether the government had entered into agreements with oil companies to explore in certain regions, the minister would respond blandly that no agreements existed or that permits had been granted that 'might' cover the areas mentioned.

In September, Camm took the unusual step of entering the Address-in-Reply debate to outline the government's policy in relation to offshore oil drilling. He did so because of the 'great deal of publicity' that the issue had attracted. Camm's address sketched the history of state authorisations to mine on the seabed for petroleum under the various acts dating back to 1923. He mentioned that since 1953 Queensland governments had granted 30 'authorities to prospect' for oil. Since 1926, five wells had been drilled to depths of up to 1700 metres in the vicinity of the reef (at Michaelmas Cay, Heron Island, Wreck Island and two at Capricornia), but no oil or gas had been found. Camm accused the opposition of having agreed to the *Petroleum (Submerged Lands) Act* of 1967 although Jack Houston disagreed saying that Labor had not known the act included drilling on the reef. Camm went on to state that the government was motivated by exploring any potential resource and earning higher royalties for the state, even though it recognised that 'more stringent safety precautions might be necessary in future off-shore drilling' (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 496). He turned the attack back on the opposition, saying that they had deliberately distorted statements he and the Premier had made for their own purposes. He then chided them over their apparent confusion about the issues:

Claims were made that we had permitted an oil rig to drill on the Barrier Reef at Anchor Cay following the [Santa Barbara] blow-out, whereas as a matter of fact, an announcement about this drilling was made by me on 15 January, 1969—some two weeks before the Santa Barbara blow-out—and a Press statement, including all the details of the drilling was issued from my office. Yet the Leader of the Opposition on 10 May was still talking about the drill being down 12,000 feet [3700 metres] and just moving off. Here in my hand is the Press statement that I issued on 15 January outlining all the conditions that would be imposed.

Mr Bennett: That's eyewash.

Mr Camm: Ah, the hon. member for South Brisbane! It is nice to see him in the Chamber. Following criticism made by the Leader of the Opposition on 10 May, I thought I would reiterate what I had said right back in 1967, so, on 13 May, in another Press statement, I set out full details of the anticipated drilling in the Repulse Bay area. There appears always to have been some confusion in the minds not only of the Opposition but also of other critics regarding the terminology used in off-shore exploration. This is understandable, as I mentioned earlier, on account of the original authorities to prospect being transitioned into prospecting permits and some of the authorities to prospect being divided into two titles, one as a prospecting permit off-shore and one as an authority to prospect covering land mass. However, I want to emphasise here something that I have always said and which has confused some people—that is the fact that there are no petroleum leases granted off shore in Queensland waters. (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 497)

His lengthy rebuttal was extended by a motion from the Primary Industries Minister, John Row, and, after a division (won by the government 41 to 25), Camm was able to speak for another 30 minutes or so. Camm quickly became sidetracked, however, in his extension of time and spent the remaining allocation attacking Tom Burns (Labor's state secretary and not yet in the Parliament) and other union members of the Queensland Central Executive of the ALP.

The proposal to build a Chicago-style suspended freeway alongside the Brisbane River also became a controversial issue in the Chamber. During a supply debate, criticism of the Brisbane Transportation Study (conducted by the US firm Wilbur Smith and Associates) was made after the Transport Minister, Bill Knox, informed the House that the consultants were finalising a report 'on public transport', hoping to give the government 'some idea of what shape it might take in the next 30 years' (*QPD* 1969:vol. 252, p. 1344). The review had been announced in August 1969 and when the report was released in 1970 it recommended the dissection of Brisbane with freeways, some involving aerial

suspension over the Brisbane River. Labor had periodically raised criticisms of the Riverside Freeway plan, arguing it spelt the end of Brisbane's trams (*QPD* 1968:vol. 250, p. 1537). Government members also expressed dissatisfaction with the proposals, with Charles Porter (Toowong) and to a lesser extent Geoff Chinchin (Mount Gravatt) both critical of the tunnel-vision of the planners. Porter argued that more emphasis ought to be placed on public transport (rail, ferries, buses and trams) rather than planning 'only for motor cars' and described the Wilbur Smith freeway proposals as creating problems not solving them. Chinchin argued for more high-density living and pointed out that the terms of reference given to Wilbur Smith were too narrow. He commented on Porter's attack by stating:

I do not quite agree with his statement that the freeways proposed in the Wilbur Smith survey will give us a concrete jungle like those of San Francisco and Los Angeles, which may not be in the best interests of the city. I remind the hon. Member that Wilbur Smith himself, when speaking to a number of members of Parliament and aldermen of the Brisbane City Council, pointed out that a transit system was outside the terms of his investigation. He said he was asked to find a means of ensuring that what he termed 'free-wheeled vehicles' could move through and about the city. (*QPD* 1969:vol. 252, p. 1425)

Chinchin went on to say it was noteworthy that 'the same firm has been employed to look into the bigger question of the best form of public transport for the city', and that he supported their claims that a public transport system could be 'imposed' on the plan. He criticised the lack of planning for transport in Brisbane and ventured that instead of merely catering for cars the planners should use railways as the basis of a transport system and locate high-rise accommodation within 'three, four or five blocks of the station' (*QPD* 1969:vol. 252, p. 1426). Paradoxically, given many Labor members held Brisbane electorates, the opposition was uncharacteristically quiet over the freeway proposal.

'We are men of integrity': all aboard the Comalco express, constructing a shareholding oligarchy

Concerns over government transparency and apparent conflicts of interest were often raised throughout the 1970s. One of the most controversial incidents occurred on the first sitting day back in the second session of the thirty-ninth Parliament on 21 July 1970. Col Bennett (ALP, South Brisbane) fired the first salvo and attempted to ask a question that Speaker Nicholson refused to allow

on the grounds that it 'imputes improper motive'. Not one to be easily silenced, Bennett continued to bait the government, stating: 'You certainly imputed improper motives. You are "Comalco kid, the Treasurer"'. You are sour because you got too many Comalco shares and have been exposed as a result' (*QPD* 1970:vol. 254, p. 5). Bennett was immediately followed by Jack Houston, who moved for the suspension of *Standing Orders* so that the shareholdings by ministers in Comalco could be discussed (*QPD* 1970:vol. 254, p. 5).

What then transpired was a sordid story of Comalco shares offered at a vastly reduced price to members of the government and the opposition. According to Houston, there were a total of 13 million fully paid 50c shares issued by Comalco. He informed the House that

the option was for the starting price of \$2.75 to be paid in full on application, or for a split payment of \$1.40 on application and the \$1.35 balance on 31 March, 1971. It was reported in the Press—the Ministers can deny it if I am wrong and I will accept their denial—that they accepted the second method, which was to pay the \$1.40 down, the rest to be paid on 31st March 1971.

He claimed that the market price of the shares was at least \$3.90 a share and then went on to report the various holdings of the ministers—namely:

- Mr Chalk and his family—2,500 shares
- The Industrial Development Minister Mr Campbell—700 shares
- The Works, Housing and Police Minister Mr Hodges—1,200 shares
- The Conservation Minister Mr Hewitt—1,200 shares
- The Local Government and Electricity Minister Mr Rae—1,500 shares
- The Health Minister Mr Tooth—1200 shares. (*QPD* 1970:vol. 254, p. 10)

He alleged that this implied that all the ministers had made a healthy profit from their favourable allocation, with Chalk making \$6250, Campbell \$1750, another \$3000 each to Hodges, Hewitt and Tooth, and Rae making \$3750.

According to Houston, he was offered some shares also, but refused the offer. Recalling Nicklin's early ruling on becoming Premier in 1957 that ministers should refrain from investing in oil shares, Houston suggested that the share offer was clearly connected with the ministers' official duties and their ability to look favourably on the company in any future dealings. He moved that 'legislation be introduced to forbid Cabinet Ministers and members of their immediate family from holding shares in companies which could be expected to have dealings with the Government through a member of Cabinet' (*QPD* 1970:vol. 254, p. 13).

Houston was passionate when he stated:

I do not care what any other member of the community does; that is his own affair. What I am concerned about is the feeling towards the integrity of our Cabinet and our parliamentary system. For very much of the time this State is governed by Orders in Council; it is not governed by this Parliament for more than half of each year. The State is governed by Cabinet and Cabinet decisions, and as a result its whole workings and operations and any agreements entered into are governed by its Cabinet. Cabinet members have these matters completely in their hands. (*QPD* 1970:vol. 254, p. 13)

Houston pleaded that the

only sane thing to do is to bring the whole matter into the open...The only credit I want is to be able to say to my children and grandchildren, 'Irrespective of its political beliefs, the Government in Queensland is one whose Cabinet Ministers are beyond reproach in their dealings with companies'. (*QPD* 1970:vol. 254, pp. 13–14)

During the debate, it transpired that the Premier had told a local newspaper that any suggestion there should be a public disclosure of any shares a minister might hold reminded him 'of what you expect in Soviet Russia'. The Premier added that he regarded 'this atmosphere of distrust as an insult' (*Telegraph*, 15 June 1970). The Premier refused point-blank to disclose his shareholdings—to either the Parliament or his cabinet colleagues.

The plot deepened when Tom Aikens informed the Parliament that some Labor members had indeed accepted the preferential share offer from Comalco. He advised that Tom Burns had received 400 shares (although Burns later claimed he gave the allocation to his father), while Jack Duggan had received 1652 shares and Jack Egerton had accepted 400 shares in total (*QPD* 1970:vol. 254, p. 17). So while Houston did not himself acquire any shares, some in his opposition team certainly did (although of course they were not ministers). Ironically, however, it was not the members who had accepted shares who came in for criticism from the Premier; instead Bjelke-Petersen made much of the fact that Houston had *not* participated in the share deal. Bjelke-Petersen reasoned that Houston could not be trusted to run the state because he was not willing to back new investments with his own money. He replied in the Assembly, somewhat unbelievably, that Houston had

confessed that he had no shares in any company or in anything else in this State. I ask what kind of man he is to seek to lead this State after making such a confession? He is not prepared to invest in any company or back any company in this State. (*QPD* 1970:vol. 254, p. 22)

Bjelke-Petersen's idiosyncratic views on ministerial responsibility became increasingly controversial. He appeared unable or unwilling to grasp any sense of impropriety if ministers owned shares or had other pecuniary interests over which they were likely to be asked to make official decisions in the future.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) journalists, in particular, posed questions about perceived conflicts of interest to the Premier, but he regularly appeared at a loss to see what the fuss was about. He feigned a startling naivety or chose to bluff any intense media scrutiny. For example, when asked whether he found it acceptable for ministers to accept preferential treatment over their business interests, he rejected the implication of the question by responding that the issue was merely the 'emotional side of the issue' and that the media was pursuing this line of questioning merely 'to sell papers' (*QPD* 1970:vol. 254, pp. 8, 21). His defence was that the people should accept that he was an honest man and that if ministers 'are prepared to back companies in this state with their own money you can't expect them to back down every time the press attacks, we would be a pretty spineless group' (Lunn 1984:78). Russ Hinze had a similar line with journalists who quizzed him on his business interests, saying to them, 'if you're so f...king smart, how come you've got no money'.

Such statements from the Premier represented a significant break with the conventions of ministerial accountability insisted on by his predecessor, Frank Nicklin. Bjelke-Petersen was indicating to his ministry and party colleagues that under his leadership it was almost expected that ministers *should* invest in development projects in the state irrespective of the fact that they might have to make decisions that could affect their own pecuniary interests. He generally evaded giving definitive answers to such questions, accusing the journalists of stirring and trying to leave the impression he was simply being entrepreneurial. In one interview on *This Day Tonight*, in 1970, he was asked:

Reporter: Well could you silence your criticisers? Have you got any shares Mr Premier?

Bjelke-Petersen: Well have I got any land? You could ask me also, have I got any Crown land that is held by the Crown...You are trying to misconstrue it so I'm not going to discuss with you when you try to create a situation such as this.

Reporter: I'm not trying to create any situation, Mr Premier...

Bjelke-Petersen: No, no, You are...

Reporter: I'm asking you whether you maintain your attitude that what you did was right and proper and whether you will continue to hold shares in public companies?

Bjelke-Petersen: I haven't got any in this particular issue at all, as you jolly well know.

Reporter: But you have held shares in companies that have had dealings with the public?

Bjelke-Petersen: If you are going to try and misconstrue it just for your own political propaganda you've got another thing coming.

The Country Party conference in June 1970 passed a motion banning ministers from accepting shares issued to them on a preferential basis. Some colleagues of the Premier would later suggest that he did not understand that he was breaching any regulations because he did not comprehend the 'concept of a conflict of interest'. Liberal leader Llew Edwards, for example, said, 'I would be surprised if he understood it fully. I think that if it was good for Queensland then that was the predominant view' (*Four Corners*, ABC TV, 2008). The Premier expressed similar views in the same *Four Corners* program: 'Would you like to have a premier or a minister or a government that never owned anything, never did anything, never achieved anything? Is that the sort of person you'd like to have?'

The Premier insisted that the ownership of shares would not 'interfere with our decisions'. He asked Queenslanders to take him on trust. Gradually, however, he was developing the paternalistic armour he would later epitomise in the saying 'don't you worry about that'—the title of his autobiography.

Some years later, the visiting British interviewer David Frost interviewed the Premier, and again the issue of ministerial shareholdings and the perception of conflicts of interest were raised. Asked about his active shareholding history while a Minister of the Crown, Bjelke-Petersen responded:

Bjelke-Petersen: We are men of integrity. We have been put there by the people year after year. The people know us.

Frost: Why not have a declaration system where you can declare all your share interests, and those of cabinet, so there can be no suspicions? They are bringing that system in Britain. Why not do that because justice must be not only done, but it must be seen to be done.

Bjelke-Petersen: The people know me and trust me. We fought an election on it. (Lunn 1984:81)

His answers were effectively a restatement of his defence made in the Parliament in July 1970 when he said: 'I can say that all members of cabinet have a reputation for honesty and integrity, and no-one can take that reputation from them' (*QPD* 1970:vol. 254, p. 24).

Significantly, therefore, Bjelke-Petersen was the subject of occasional media scrutiny over his financial dealings from the outset of his premiership. Rumours persisted throughout the next two decades that ministers used their influence and internal knowledge to advantage themselves. Shares, land deals, rezoning, the tendering of contracts were all fair game for private profit. By the time Bjelke-Petersen was deposed as Premier in late 1987, it would become clear that there was very little sense of accountability or probity displayed by many of his ministers.

The leadership abyss: saved by guile, cunning and deceit

Bjelke-Petersen's initial grip on power was most tenuous, especially as he had two contenders for his position: the Liberals' Leader, Gordon Chalk, and from within his own party the Deputy Leader, Ron Camm.⁸ Despite winning the May 1969 election, Bjelke-Petersen was still feeling his way and remained unpopular among colleagues. His unpopularity stemmed from his awkward, wooden image and dour demeanour, as well as the controversies he seemed continually to attract, the fears of some Country Party members of losing electoral territory in provincial seats and the need for the party to find a credible leader equal to the Liberals' Chalk. The new Premier was also often offside with his own cabinet—earning him the moniker of a 'lone ranger'.

Initially, some speculation suggested that Camm was after the Premier's job. Marty Hanson (ALP, Port Curtis) told the Assembly that 'as the deputy leader of the Country Party, [Camm] wanted to start the session as Deputy Premier [instead of Chalk] and when the Premier was away on official business he wanted to be known in the Press and elsewhere as the Acting Premier'. Hanson concluded that 'the minister has plotted against his colleagues' (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, pp. 507–8). Jack Houston later suggested that Bjelke-Petersen's leadership had been questioned as early as June 1969 in retaliation for the Premier organising against Camm (*QPD* 1970:vol. 255, p. 1333). Houston then argued that when the formal challenge arose in October 1970 this was in fact the second challenge to Bjelke-Petersen's leadership by his party colleagues.

Later, Chalk recalled that 'the older members of the Cabinet considered that Camm would be a better leader...there was fear within CP ranks that Petersen was losing ground particularly in provincial city areas such as Ayr, Mackay,

⁸ The story of the failed coup against Bjelke-Petersen in October 1970 has been adequately documented in other publications—notably, Hugh Lunn's *Joh* (1978) and *Johannes Bjelke-Petersen: A political biography* (1984) and Rae Wear's *Johannes Bjelke-Petersen: The Lord's premier* (2002:91–5).

Gladstone, Redcliffe, Gold Coast’ (Hazlehurst 1987:251). Chalk named the following Country Party members as being ‘worried about their own future’: Val Bird (Burdekin), Ron Camm (Whitsunday), David Nicholson (Murrumba), Jim Houghton (Redcliffe) and Russ Hinze (South Coast). At the time, only Camm was a minister.

Most speculation, however, focused on whether (and when) Chalk would take over the Premiership. Labor would regularly accuse Bjelke-Petersen of being ‘subservient to the Deputy Premier’ and being ‘completely subservient’ to the Liberal-led government in Canberra. Lou Jensen (ALP, Bundaberg) kept rubbing salt in the wound, insisting right up to the leadership challenge that ‘the Treasurer, we know, wants to be our next Premier...[but] is not game to have a go against the Premier’ (*QPD* 1970:vol. 254, p. 1137). Pat Hanlon (ALP, Baroona) added further jibes by claiming that ‘at the Premiers’ conference the Premier of New South Wales, Mr Askin, referred particularly to the “Liberal” Premier of Queensland’ (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 976). He claimed that the other premiers regarded Chalk as the real premier. Hughie O’Donnell (ALP, Barcoo) argued that because Bjelke-Petersen was ‘subservient to the Liberal party interests’ the Parliament should question his ‘leadership of this State when it comes to obtaining’ financial support for Queensland. Such attacks tarnished Bjelke-Petersen’s image not only among his Coalition colleagues but more importantly in the eyes of Country Party supporters in the bush. Rural newspapers were also beginning openly to question the performance of the new Premier.⁹

Some Liberals added fuel to the fire, escalating public dissent over the new Premier’s style. After Arthur Crawford launched a thinly disguised critique of cabinet’s decisions on health funding in late 1969, his colleague Charles Porter came to his defence, claiming:

We Liberals have seen a big and oppressive change come over the scene in the last three years...I think one of the main reasons is that we have tended to abandon a basic tenet of our philosophy, particularly the role of the individual in our society. There has been a growing tendency for those on top to want the power of decision left in the hands of the relative few. To me, the philosophy which my party stands for means nothing once we abandon the right of individual members to dissent, object and criticize. Otherwise we appear to be adopting Labour’s very servile acceptance of decisions from the top—right or wrong, wise or unwise. If we are to successfully commence the long, hard road back

9 For example, the *Longreach Leader* ran attacks on Bjelke-Petersen’s lack of gravitas as a leader. The paper accused him of caving in to the city-based Liberals over the lack of adequate drought relief. It ran a headline stating ‘Does Joh Bjelke-Petersen possess “feet of clay”?’ (28 August 1969).

we have to return to a basic tenet of Liberal philosophy, namely, the recognition of the fact that there is at least as much virtue, and sometimes more, in dissent as in assent. (*QPD* 1969:vol. 252, p. 1244)

Porter linked the decline in the support for the Liberals at the 1969 election (a drop of 2.2 per cent) with their compliance and subservience towards the Bjelke-Petersen-led cabinet. Porter would later become something of a rallying point to the ultra-Liberals, who tried to back Porter in a challenge to Chalk's leadership.

The loss of a second Country Party seat in a by-election (Albert was lost to the Liberal's Bill Heatley in February 1970 and Isis was lost to Labor in November 1968) served only to further diminish the Premier's standing among his colleagues. Certainly, the ALP attempted to portray such results as evidence of voter dissatisfaction with the new Premier—and mud began to stick. Allegations of conflicts of interest over shareholdings fuelled the uncertainty over his leadership (although other government members had received shares from companies doing business in Queensland and at the time such investments were not considered improper or inappropriate by many of his colleagues). Bjelke-Petersen had also been out-manoeuvred by public opinion opposed to the mining of rutile sands on the Sunshine Coast—the so-called 'battle of Cooloola'. By late 1970, Bjelke-Petersen was looking accident prone, unpopular, politically on the defensive and at times economical with the truth, while self-interestedly avaricious and somewhat devious over his business interests. He appeared incapable of matching the stature of Nicklin.

In a state renowned for its strong domineering premiers, a leadership spill soon became inevitable. The timing of the move against the Premier was, however, sudden and unexpected.¹⁰ According to one biographer, Bjelke-Petersen 'had no idea of what was going on' and was taken by surprise at the actions of his colleagues (Lunn 1978:83). Townsend (1983:279) suggests that due to his mother's recent death, 'Joh's sixth sense failed to alert him of the impending crisis'. Murphy (1971:121) recorded that the Speaker, David Nicholson, planned a 'coup' that was 'thwarted when news of the plotters' intention to overthrow the Premier and replace him as leader with the Minister for Mines, Mr R. E. Camm, was given to Mr Bjelke-Petersen by one of his supporters'. In the Parliament, Houston gave a different version, claiming that 'the actions of the rebels was [sic] a well-kept secret until, apparently, one person in the know had

¹⁰ A number of contemporary accounts refer to the unexpected timing of the coup catching everyone a little cold—for example, Lunn (1978:83) and Chalk (quoted in Hazlehurst 1987:251). Those Country Party members voting against the Premier included: Mike Ahern, Ron Camm, Alan Fletcher, Russ Hinze, Jim Houghton, Vince Jones, Bill Lonergan, David Nicholson, Harry Richter, John Row and Vic Sullivan.

too much to drink and spilled the plot to one of the Premier's supporters' (*QPD* 1970:vol. 255, p. 1330). The plotters intended to make the Lands Minister, Vic Sullivan, deputy leader.

Nicholson then led a delegation of four (himself, plus Jim Houghton, Russ Hinze and Bill Lonergan) on the evening of Tuesday 20 October 1970 to inform the Premier that a vote of no confidence in his leadership would be put to the party room the next morning (Wednesday 21 October). Claiming they had the numbers for a leadership spill (potentially by 16 to 10 of the 26 members of the party room), they 'asked him to resign' (Murphy 1971:121). The meeting was marked by 'angry exchanges between the Premier and Mr Lonergan' over who should lead the party to the next election (*Courier-Mail*, 22 October 1971). Bjelke-Petersen threatened to sack any minister who was not loyal to his leadership—and confronted with this ultimatum, Camm indicated that he would agree to be a candidate only if the position was vacant. Press reports lend weight to this interpretation with indications that the four plotters had originally intended to warn the Premier on Wednesday morning just before a leadership vote was called in the party room, but 'brought the meeting forward because they believed that Mr Bjelke-Petersen had heard of their plan from another source' (*Courier-Mail*, 22 October 1970).

A number of other writers (Lunn 1978:83; Hughes 1980:176; Hazlehurst 1987:250; Reynolds 2002:30; Walter and Dickie 1985:35; Walter 2003:310) do not mention that Bjelke-Petersen independently got wind of the coup and accuse the plotters of ineptitude or foolishness in committing the 'fatal courtesy of forewarning' the Premier the evening before. They stress that the mistake allowed time for the Premier to use his native guile and political cunning, staying up most of the night phoning colleagues to win over their support. From the Premier's own account (Townsend 1983:264), he attended a business dinner that went to 11pm, then 'went to bed for a few hours and by 5 am I was already on the telephone endeavouring to make contact with colleagues'. In any event, by the morning, Bjelke-Petersen had convinced two to change their vote; he also used his tactical nous to initiate a vote *of confidence* in his leadership (moved by Henry McKechnie) rather than face a no-confidence motion from his opponents (because he reasoned he would have no ministerial challenger if the party room was unable to have the position declared vacant). At the weekly party meeting, the Premier orchestrated a vote of confidence in his leadership. Accounts of the vote differ. One account, seemingly accurate according to press reports the next day, suggests the vote was tied 11–11 after which the Premier used two proxy votes to hold on to the post by 13 to 11 (Hughes 1980:176). Twenty-two party members attended the meeting, implying four parliamentarians were absent and did not vote. Another version, in Lunn (1978), suggests Bjelke-Petersen appeared to be losing the confidence vote 11–13, but then claimed to

have the proxy vote of one absent member (Neville Hewitt, who was overseas). According to Lunn, when the initial vote was 11–13 the Premier then voted for himself and used Hewitt's supposed proxy to tie the vote 13 all (a result also repeated by Walter 2003:310). Significantly, four of the six other Country Party ministers voted against their Premier (namely—Ron Camm, Alan Fletcher, John Row and Vic Sullivan). Only the newcomer, Max Hodges, voted for the Premier. While the tie was humiliating, it meant, as Lunn (1978:84) argues, 'his opponents thus could not command the votes to get rid of him'. There has been much speculation about whether Bjelke-Petersen ever spoke to Hewitt and in fact had his proxy. While the Premier insisted he had the proxy, one of the two tellers at the party-room vote, Mike Ahern, claimed the Premier never secured the proxy and lied purely to survive. The *Courier-Mail* (22 October 1970) the next day carried a report that 'some disappointed Country Party members last night claimed that one of the proxies held by the Premier was from a member who reversed his decision by telegram only early yesterday morning'. So, if the Premier did manage to contact Hewitt, he could have convinced him to change his mind. If he could not contact Hewitt, he almost certainly manipulated his vote and lied.

Some of the losers sought to have a second go by defeating the Premier either in the House or at a joint-party room meeting. The dissidents seemed prepared to risk a vote against his leadership on the floor of the Parliament but the party acted swiftly to shore up Joh's leadership. Robert Sparkes, the Country Party's President, flew to Brisbane to warn the disgruntled party members 'you have had your go and failed so the question is now settled' and he added 'if you go into the House and support any no-confidence motion you do your endorsement' (Lunn 1978:84). Sparkes was effectively threatening MPs and promising to arrange their dis-endorsement if they voted as they themselves wished (which was illegal intimidation of a member under state law). Chalk had also given Bjelke-Petersen his personal commitment of support on the morning of the challenge. He remembered:

There is no doubt that the intervention by Sparkes prevented a vote of no-confidence, but I have never believed that such a vote would have taken place in open Parliament. What was brewing was a special meeting of the Joint Party Parliamentary members, and if a vote of no-confidence was then moved by and seconded by two CP members, and a secret ballot taken, Joh would have lost. (Hazlehurst 1987:251)

The fate of the plotters was sealed: Camm was too powerful to demote from the ministry, but he remained in substantially the same portfolio until he retired in 1980. Lunn (1978:85) records that 'of the four men who came to see him, Bjelke-Petersen never forgave one [Nicholson] and shunted him into political oblivion, although he made another [Hinze] a minister'. Neither Lonergan nor Houghton

ever made the ministry but both became Speaker—Lonergan in 1972 and Houghton in 1974. In contrast, Hewitt’s ministerial career prospered perhaps as a result of his silence over the proxy issue; and McKechnie was elevated to the ministry in June 1972. Although the botched coup ended a little inconclusively, the event underlined Bjelke-Petersen’s ‘persistence and endurance’ (Walter and Dickie 1985:34). From that point onwards, his parliamentary performances indicated his confidence was growing tangibly. For instance, when challenged for using the new government aircraft 45 times in the first four months after its purchase (most of which were return trips to his hometown of Kingaroy), he was asked ‘how does he justify this?’ The Premier responded on the offensive:

I am the Premier of this State and I have a very big responsibility not only in my electorate but throughout Queensland. As the honourable member knows, I have travelled very extensively throughout Queensland on Government business, and I inform him that I intend to continue to do so. (*QPD* 1971:vol. 257, p. 148)

The immediate result of the failed coup led to a want-of-confidence motion against the Premier moved by the Opposition Leader in the Parliament. On Friday 23 October, directly after question time, Houston moved that Bjelke-Petersen ‘obviously no longer has the support of the majority of members of the coalition parties and so should, in such circumstances, resign his Commission as Premier’ (*QPD* 1970:vol. 255, p. 1329). He cited British cabinet practice that required a prime minister to ‘bind together his cabinet colleagues’ or step aside. He believed two other reasons lay behind the revolt. He speculated that the coup was a parliamentary revolt ‘against the outside influence of the executive of the Country Party, headed by the now well-known Mr Sparkes, as it was against the premier’ (*QPD* 1970:vol. 255, p. 1330). He also linked the plotters’ motives to ‘sour grapes’ over missing out on getting some of the Comalco shares in April 1970. According to Houston:

The Minister for Local Government (Mr Rae) received 1,500 shares, the Minister for Conservation (Mr Hewitt) received 1,200 shares, and the Minister for Works (Mr Hodges) received 1,200 shares...it is strange that, when the shares were being handed out, only those Ministers whom the premier could rely on were included in the offer. If they had been the senior members of the coalition perhaps that could have been a reason why they, and just they alone, received the shares. But three junior Cabinet Ministers were involved—important men to the company no doubt. There was no seniority or any other apparent reason why, out of eight Country party Cabinet members, three should be given special treatment. (*QPD* 1970:vol. 255, p. 1332)

All three junior ministers voted to support the Premier (with the Premier claiming Hewitt's proxy).

Percy Tucker told the Assembly that the four plotters had secretly met in a room in 'this House which I am told the Premier now calls the 'treason room' (*QPD* 1970:vol. 255, p. 1334). He concluded with the statement:

The question before the House is not whether the Premier is a 'good bloke'. It is not whether he is a fine Christian gentleman. It is not whether he is a decent sort of fellow. Rather [it is] whether he has the capability, the resolution and the ability to manage men that would make him a good leader. And the members of the Country Party, by their own actions, have given a resounding 'no' to that vital question. (*QPD* 1970:vol. 255, p. 1340)

In defending the Premier, Gordon Chalk pointed out the apparent contradiction in the opposition's case, with Houston implying that Bjelke-Petersen was a 'weakling' while his deputy denounced him as a 'dictator and an arrogant man' (*QPD* 1970:vol. 255, p. 1340). He reiterated that the Premier had successfully orchestrated a vote of confidence in his leadership, was the leader of the largest party in the Coalition and implied it was not the business of the Liberals who the Country Party chose to lead it. Ron Camm, who accused Tucker of having a 'thick skull', was more forthright, stating:

In any worth-while political party comprising men of independent spirit, there must at times be differences of opinion on how a situation can best be handled. There was no suggestion at all in the discussions on this matter that the policy of the Country Party, or of the Government, was in question. The only issue for discussion was how was that policy being presented, and how the Government's decisions were being accepted by the people...The internal workings of any political party are not the business of Parliament. We all have our differences internally, but we do not come into this House and air them. (*QPD* 1970:vol. 225, p. 1347)

Bjelke-Petersen completed his own defence by claiming Labor was merely engaged in personal attacks on his character and that Houston in particular 'has in a scurrilous and vicious manner endeavoured to impute things to me that he knows are completely untrue' (*QPD* 1970:vol. 255, p. 1348). He suggested the government now displayed 'solidarity' and that Labor was trying to 'confuse the public'. And on the question of his public image, he responded:

The image of the Government, or the Opposition for that matter, is not entirely tied up with the leader. He is the focal point, but his image is reflected through every member of his organization or party...the parliamentary members of the Country Party decided last Wednesday to

pass a vote of confidence in my leadership; the ballot result was accepted by all members of the party. It has been accepted by our coalition partners. Any issues involved have been resolved. (QPD 1970:vol. 225, p. 1347)

The no-confidence motion was lost on party lines by a vote of 40 to 29.

The Springboks' rugby union tour of 1971: the grooming of 'Jackboots Bjelke'

Bjelke-Petersen had been worrying about his image and public standing for the whole of his period as Premier. He had reluctantly tried to soften his image by attending fetes and horseraces and providing country meetings with free beer and, as previously mentioned, also sought the services of a publicity consultant, Hugh Bingham, to work on his image problems. In May 1971, however, Bjelke-Petersen elevated his concerns to new heights by engaging ABC journalist Allen Callaghan as his media adviser and press secretary (formerly Government News and Information Officer), after the Premier had famously had an on-air spat with him. Callaghan would professionalise his communications with the media, crystallise the message and give him an image of 'a man of steel' (Townsend 1983:318). From this moment on Bjelke-Petersen would earn himself the nickname of 'Jackboots Bjelke' (see Lunn 1984; Wells 1979:Ch. 3) and forever after be depicted in cartoons in a tropical Nazi uniform with jodhpurs and banana swastikas on his sleeve. Callaghan was an astute political adviser, playing to the Premier's parochialism and reminding him that 'there are no votes south of Coolangatta'.

The Parliament was in recess and not recalled when cabinet declared a state of emergency on 14 July 1971. The emergency measures were taken in anticipation of expected public demonstrations and possible strikes to be held against the tour of the white South African Springboks rugby team. The Police Minister admitted that cabinet had made the decision to impose emergency powers only on a verbal report from the minister (Lunn 1984:89). No written report was submitted. The Governor, Sir Alan Mansfield, then proclaimed the month-long emergency powers under the *State Transport Acts 1938–43*, which was published in an extraordinary *Government Gazette*. The proclamation gave the government, the police and other departmental officials wide-ranging powers to guarantee the staging of the event and to maintain public order. It was the first such emergency declared since the Mount Isa strike of 1964–65 called by Nicklin and before that by Hanlon over the Ipswich railway strike in 1948. Never before had one been declared over a sporting contest.

Bjelke-Petersen acknowledged at the time that the Police Commissioner, Ray Whitrod, had not requested such special powers for his police (*Courier-Mail*, 15 July 1971, p. 1). The police had, however, claimed the rugby ground at Ballymore could not be secured for the games and recommended the venue be switched to the Exhibition Ground (RNA Showgrounds) instead. The President of the Royal National Agricultural Association, however, protested. According to Bjelke-Petersen, he

rang the President of the Show Society and I said to him... 'I want the exhibition ground for playing the Springbok matches'... They said: 'No way, Mr Premier, we've got an exhibition coming up in three weeks... and the unions will black ban us'. So I said: 'Well you had better all come into my office'. So I had in the meantime, ready for the fact that they wouldn't do it, I had the papers to declare a State of Emergency drawn up and I just signed them in front of them when they said no... so I signed the State of Emergency and handed it to the President and said: 'Well the grounds are mine now and I'll take them'. (Wear 2002:137)

When the South African rugby team arrived in Brisbane, their hotel in Wickham Terrace was the site of demonstrations, with protesters holding placards saying 'Welcome home racists' (Harris 1972:129). Major demonstrations then followed at the Springboks' games (in Brisbane and Toowoomba) and at a large public rally in Brisbane on 26 July. A one-day strike also reputedly cost Queensland more than \$6 million in lost wages and production. Police were awarded an extra week's annual leave to reward their loyalty during the episodes.

The Opposition Leader, Jack Houston, was reportedly shocked at the lack of consultation and urged the immediate recall of the Parliament. He claimed the emergency declaration was politically motivated and designed to divert attention from the government's own shortcomings 10 days before two by-elections were due to be held. He said it was absurd for a government to use such powers to 'cope with a sport event' (*Courier-Mail*, 14 July 1971, p. 3). In reply, Bjelke-Petersen claimed he had given no consideration to the effect his action would have on the upcoming elections although he admitted that 80 per cent of Queenslanders favoured the tour going ahead (*Courier-Mail*, 15 July 1971, p. 1). Only two dissident Liberals protested over the extreme action of the government. Backbencher Bill Hewitt sent a telegram to the Premier claiming cabinet had 'overreacted', stating '[i]t is questionable whether such measures should have been taken'. Federal member for Moreton, Jim Killen, stated that the government's action was a 'grossly improper use of political power' (*Courier-Mail*, 15 July 1971, p. 3). Generally, Bjelke-Petersen enjoyed the support of his Liberal Party colleagues and some have even claimed part of the planning was down to Chalk (Wear 2002:137).

When the Parliament returned on 27 July 1971, Houston rose on a matter of privilege, noting that it was ‘unique in the history of this Parliament in that we are opening this session under a state of emergency imposed by proclamation made on 14 July’. Although the Speaker was unwilling to allow a matter of privilege to go ahead on the opening day, Hanlon interjected that in such extenuating circumstances the matter should be raised immediately. Houston reiterated that the Premier ‘had every opportunity of calling Parliament together earlier and he should have’. Russ Hinze chose to respond by replying: ‘You brought it on yourselves.’ The Speaker then remarked that the ‘present situation portends a very bleak future for the coming session’ and placed on record that he intended ‘to see that this Parliament runs in accordance with the decorum to which it is accustomed’ (*QPD* 1971:vol. 257, p. 5).

Bjelke-Petersen’s stance over the Springboks’ tour and his tough suppression of protesters became the making of his political career. He went from being ‘Joh the uncertain’ with a wooden image to Joh the ‘man of steel’ with a high profile not only in Queensland but throughout Australia. The Springboks incidents not only made Joh’s career, they galvanised the conviction of a future Queensland Premier, Peter Beattie, who was beaten by police inside the old Trades Hall during a running demonstration. The major casualties in the immediate term were civil liberties and the ALP.

In the heat of the moment: fighting two by-elections, in Merthyr and Maryborough

In April 1971, Sam Ramsden (Lib., Merthyr) announced he was disillusioned with politics and was quitting his seat. He had served on the Liberal backbench since the Coalition formed government in 1957. A second vacant seat was caused by the death of Labor’s former Whip, Horace Davies, in Maryborough on 4 June. On the day of Davies’ funeral, the government announced that both by-elections would be held on the same day: 24 July 1971. The Liberal Party nominated Don Lane, a former police detective senior constable (Special Branch), to contest the Merthyr by-election, while the ALP, with Alderman Brian Mellifont, and the DLP, with Peter Flanagan, also ran candidates. In one of his first unsuccessful tilts at entering parliament, the later federal minister Con Sciacca, then twenty-three, also contested Labor’s preselection. Lane attributed his comfortable win to his ‘strong law and order’ campaign against political and industrial dissidents, especially over the Vietnam War and more recently over the South African Springboks’ tour, while the DLP, finishing third, claimed the ‘result was obviously a protest by the people against the drift towards anarchy’ (*Sunday Mail*, 25 July 1971). While Labor tried to paint the former Special

Branch detective as ‘Shady Lane the police spy’, Lane later recalled that the ‘violent climate of demonstrations and protest...undoubtedly helped me to win my way into Parliament’ (Lane 1993:63, 72).

In the Maryborough by-election, the Liberals’ Alderman Gilbert Alison and the Country Party’s E. R. Jurss challenged Labor’s Alderman G. A. Zamek. The DLP, with M. Minnegal, and an independent, B. Dau, also ran. Alison defeated Zamek, recording a narrow win to the Liberals—its third by-election win in a row. The Labor Party argued that its loss of the seat was due to ‘racism’ while the Liberals maintained that voters wanted ‘stability and responsibility in government’.

The Liberal victories—achieved on the same day the Springboks played in Brisbane—were touted by the Premier as vindication of the government’s tough stance on law and order (Harris 1972:139). As a result of these by-elections, the standing of the parties in the Parliament was Country Party 25, Liberals 21, Labor 30, with the DLP and NQLP having one seat each.

A messy electoral redistribution: the ginger revolt

Queensland governments had long tinkered with the electoral rules, usually amending legislation to favour their incumbency. The last redistribution had taken place in 1958 and a further one was overdue. An initial Electoral Districts Bill was introduced on 25 March 1971, which proposed to retain the existing 78 seats and the three zones (metropolitan with 30 seats, provincial cities with 20 and the country zone with 28). This bill was premised on the Liberals agreeing not to initiate any further three-cornered contests. Bjelke-Petersen insisted in the Parliament that all government members sign a ‘pledge’ promising they would not take part in such contests. He was rebuffed, however, by six members (five Liberals—Charles Porter, John Murray, Bill Hewitt, Geoff Chinchen and Arthur Crawford—and one Country Party member, Bill Lonergan).

The proposed bill was most contentious to the Liberals. The party’s state executive voted to oppose the bill because of its perceived ‘electoral injustice’. In the early hours of 31 March (in a sitting lasting beyond midnight), the government lost a vote on the bill by 38–39, with eight Liberal backbenchers (the ‘ginger group’: Chinchen, Crawford, Hewitt, Hughes, Lickiss, Miller, Murray and Porter) voting with Labor to defeat the bill. When these members crossed the floor, Russ Hinze reputedly said ‘fucking traitors, fucking traitors’—a comment not recorded in *Hansard*, but alluded to in the *Courier-Mail* (Lunn 1978:122). The same combination voted to pass an amendment moved by Charles Porter that would have reduced the country weighting and increased the seats in the south-

eastern zone (Porter proposed six western seats, six south-western seats and 66 eastern seats, of which 45 were in the south-east and 21 were along the eastern coastline to Cooktown). Gordon Chalk was somewhat furious over the defeat of the government because it skittled a deal he had secured with the Premier over the zonal mix in exchange for the promise of no further three-cornered contests. It then appeared the government would allow the bill to lapse, implying the forthcoming 1972 election would be fought on the 1958 boundaries.

The government, however, reintroduced the Electoral Districts Bill, this time with 82 seats divided into four zones with different quotas of electors but based on local authority boundaries. The four zones were: the south-eastern zone (47 seats); the provincial cities zone (13 seats); the country zone (15 seats); and the western and far northern zone (with seven seats). The bill provided for three electoral commissioners to conduct the redistribution and finalise the eventual boundaries of the seats within the zones. This time the 'ginger group' was placated with promises and the bill was passed over five sitting days on party lines. Bjelke-Petersen was in no mind to provide a platform on the floor of the Parliament for dissenters and at one stage in the debate gagged John Murray (*QPD* 1970:vol. 257, p. 140). The divisive passage of this bill is important not only because it illustrates the electoral tensions within the government and the first real revolt by the Liberal backbench to the Country Party-led government, but because the eventual new boundaries entrenched the zonal disadvantage against the Liberal and Labor Parties.

One casualty of the 1971 redistribution was the Attorney-General, Peter Delamothe, whose seat of Bowen was carved up and placed largely within the adjoining Country Party seat of Whitsunday. He was offered a safe Liberal seat in Brisbane but declined the offer (Delamothe and Stevenson 1989:104). The effect of Delamothe's departure was to wipe out Liberal Party representation in the north of the state.

The claimant state: the budget is broke

The Treasurer, Gordon Chalk, delivered his sixth budget in September 1971, claiming it was the most difficult he had prepared and announcing that Queensland faced tough financial pressures. He declared it his 'go ahead budget', but admitted that the state would run up a \$7 million deficit in 1971/72. To help make ends meet, he indicated that Queensland would apply to become a 'claimant state' dependent on special funding assistance from the Commonwealth Grants Commission, but also with strings attached. This was the first time the state had applied for such additional budgetary augmentation.

The *Courier-Mail* (24 September 1971) commented that 'Queensland will not lose control of its own affairs when it becomes a claimant state. The gains will outweigh the disadvantages.' It commented in an editorial that the 1971/72 budget was 'perhaps the most significant introduced by a Queensland Treasurer in all the years since World War II'. It then added, however, that 'no Budget which increases taxes, fares and charges makes for pleasant reading. This Budget is no exception.' Queensland was able to make the case for special assistance due to a deterioration of revenues in comparison with other states. Over the next few months, Queensland would receive an additional \$9 million from the Grants Commission and a further \$2.35 million from the premiers' conference. Business groups criticised the government for failing to control its spending and not practising restraint.

Daylight saving experiment

In 1971, the *Daylight Saving Act* was passed providing for 'summer time' from 31 October 1971 to 27 February 1972 as a one-off trial. The government made it clear it would evaluate the 'purely experimental' trial at its conclusion and was not necessarily committed to adopting it into the future. The proposal to put clocks forward by one hour was largely to keep Queensland in line with the southern states, especially Victoria and New South Wales, which were pushing ahead with their own trials. At the end of the Queensland trial, the government decided not to continue with the experiment. It did not attempt another trial until Mike Ahern's government in its final days tried a further test in 1989 to appease city residents, business groups and tourism groups. After the 1971-72 trial, community attitudes generally hardened against daylight saving, but the issue would resurface during the Ahern administration, leading to a divisive second trial in 1989-90. A referendum on daylight saving was put to the electorate in February 1992 and was soundly defeated.

Foul language: earning the Speaker's wrath and a proposal for all-party committees

The Queensland Parliament was ever a robust chamber with many vehement interchanges and much personal abuse. In October 1971, the Speaker, David Nicholson, became concerned about the current standard of debates and warned members about the decline in the standards of their language on the floor of the Assembly. The *Courier-Mail* (16 October 1971) took up the issue, commenting that it was not surprising that Nicholson

believes the language being used by Queensland's Parliamentarians has 'never been worse than at present'. Parliamentarians might be excused for occasional lapses into the colourful local idiom which always has set Australian Parliamentary debate apart from that in less lusty chambers. Some speakers no doubt feel they can express themselves better when they add a little home-grown slang. But there is a difference between idiom and coarseness. Language lapses are in danger of becoming commonplace in the Queensland Parliament. There is no need to resort to using expressions such as 'rat', 'cheat', and 'liar' as reverberated around the Chamber on one day this week. Threats of 'punch ups' and one description of a member as the 'most loud mouthed flapjack to enter the Chamber' hardly have a place in Parliament's official record.

In a surprise move, on 17 March 1971, the Liberal reformer and member of the 'ginger group' Bill Hewitt called for the establishment of a series of 'all-party parliamentary committees' (meaning select committees that would be established by a parliament and lapse when the project was completed or when the Parliament ended) to investigate areas of policy such as Aboriginal affairs, social problems, pollution, industrial safety and the road toll. He stopped short, however, of suggesting standing committees looking into public accounts or public works (*QPD* 1971:vol. 256, pp. 3017–19). His proposal had some support among some Liberals but very little across the government more broadly.

All pushing their own barrows: the election campaign of May 1972

A number of longstanding members announced their intention not to recontest their seats at the May 1972 elections. Two ministers called it quits after 12 years in government: John Row and Peter Delamothe, both of whom had served for nine years respectively as the Primary Industries Minister (Agriculture and Forestry) and the Minister for Justice and Attorney-General. Delamothe (Lib., Bowen) had been appointed in December 1971 to the post of Agent-General for Queensland in London largely because his seat of Bowen had been abolished in the redistribution. Others who chose not to re-stand included Sir Harold Richter and Les Diplock. Four Assembly seats were vacant at the time of the 1972 election: Callide after Vince Jones (CP) died in October 1971 a year after the failed coup; Albert after Bill Heatley (Lib.) died; Balone after Harold Hungerford (CP) died in January 1972; and Bowen after Delamothe resigned. With the 1972 election pending, no further by-elections were called to find replacements.

On the opposition side, the Labor Party had dis-endorsed three sitting members in January 1972—namely: Col Bennett (South Brisbane), Merv Thackeray (Rockhampton North) and Ed Casey (Mackay). The dis-endorsements occurred not because the members concerned were regarded as dead wood.¹¹ Rather, their ousting as official candidates occurred because they had all challenged the Trades Hall machine. Bennett, in particular—one of the most outspoken members in the Parliament—claimed that he had been ‘knifed’ by Tom Burns in a ‘Trades Hall purge’ but insisted he would ‘not run like a whipped dog’ (*Sunday Sun*, 30 January 1972). He argued that the attack on his endorsement came as no surprise, because as soon as he had made statements critical of Burns, the ALP State Secretary, during the 1971 Springboks tour, this meant that ‘the knife went into me then and I expected what happened’. Each of the three dis-endorsed candidates decided to re-stand as independents (under a title of the ‘True Labor Party!’—making this Queensland’s fourth Labor Party grouping within a decade). Only Casey, who had resigned his ALP membership in February, managed to retain his seat, defeating the Country Party candidate with ALP preferences (and winning the seat with 63.38 per cent of the two party-preferred vote). Thackeray (on just 23.18 per cent) and Bennett (19.61 per cent) polled poorly in the primary vote and were heavily defeated by the endorsed Labor candidates, Les Yewdale and Fred Bromley respectively. Bromley was the sitting member for the neighbouring seat of Norman, which was abolished and merged into the existing South Brisbane. Bromley’s key campaign tactic was to doorknock the entire electorate with cooking recipes: he delivered ‘how to vote—how to cook’ cards that included recipes for peanut drops, date shells, coconut biscuits, cornflake cookies and raspberry ruffs (*Sunday Sun*, 23 April 1972). Interestingly, Jack Houston claimed that his team was the ‘most competent team than ever before’ (*Courier-Mail*, 31 January 1972). Not surprisingly, Bjelke-Petersen chose to disagree, claiming that because of political expediency Labor was ditching its ‘Old Team’ based on the Jack Houston–Percy Tucker leadership and replacing it with the Houston and Clem Jones partnership (*Courier-Mail*, 3 March 1972). The Premier was referring to a large poster that was plastered around Brisbane (on rubbish bins!) with Clem Jones’s smiling face over the slogan ‘Vote the Houston–Jones Team’. This was in reference to the announcement that Brisbane’s popular Lord Mayor, Clem Jones, would stand as a Labor candidate for Yeronga. He would prove to be unsuccessful in ousting the Liberal sitting member, Norman Lee.

The membership of the new Parliament was increased by four—from 78 to 82—and for the second time running every seat was contested. A total of 279 candidates stood for election (an increase of 33 from 1969), and for the first time since the war the ALP stood a candidate in every electorate (as the party would

¹¹ Thackeray—whom Denis Murphy described as a ‘log’—had served since 1957 and Bennett since 1960, but Casey had served only one term, and all were relatively active performers.

then do in each election to 1992). The reason for standing in each electorate was that Labor wanted to have a state-wide vote to use in its arguments over malapportionment. The DLP made its last big stand (contesting 72 electorates) and believed its preferences would determine the result. It also stood the first Torres Strait Islander candidate, in the seat of Cook: Ben Nona, a former policeman and local pearl diver from Badu Island.

Three-cornered contests were again a significant element of the campaign. The initiative for these contests generally came from branch-level Liberals anxious to wrest territory from the 'ownership' of the Country Party. The Liberal state campaign committee attempted to prevent three-cornered contests or limit their number, with Chalk taking a strong line against them and insisting on unity between the parties. The Transport Minister, Bill Knox, admitted that while there could be some benefit to the Coalition's overall vote from a tight exchange of preferences, 'there are political dangers and hazards involved in running candidates against sitting candidates of our coalition partner' (*Courier-Mail*, 11 March 1972). The Premier also warned the Liberals of 'serious consequences' if local branches challenged sitting Country Party members (*Courier-Mail*, 16 January 1972). These edicts did not, however, prevent them occurring.

The Liberals again challenged Russ Hinze in the 'key seat' of South Coast. Hinze tried unsuccessfully to stave off a three-cornered contest by offering a deal to the Liberals that he would not try to extend the Country Party's influence on the Gold Coast if he was not personally challenged. When this was rejected, Hinze warned that 'if anybody attacks me I'll fight like hell. And I don't care what I do or how I do it.' He blustered: 'If they want to have a crack at me, they'll know they are in the ring' (*Courier-Mail*, 16 January 1971). The ALP, however, decided this time to allocate its second preferences to the Liberal candidate, Bruce Bishop, making Hinze's fight all the more difficult. In the final result, the Liberals finished a poor third in South Coast behind Hinze, who held his seat on Liberal preferences against the ALP's Ron Todd.

The Liberals also selected Redcliffe and Landsborough for challenges. In Redcliffe, the Country Party's Jim Houghton narrowly survived a three-way contest, coming second to the ALP but winning on Liberal preferences, while in Landsborough Mike Ahern held his seat easily with a majority of the primary vote. The Country Party, however, decided not to retaliate by entering its own candidates against sitting Liberal members in the election (although it did float the idea of running the popular Toowoomba Mayor, Nell Robinson, for Chalk's seat of Lockyer). The Reverend Alan Male from the Churches of Christ (later to stand as a National in Murrumba, and then appointed to head the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care in the Borbidge government, 1996–98) stood as a Country Party candidate for the new seat of Pine Rivers, but lost to the ALP's Ken Leese—a 'oncer' who would lose his seat in the rout of 1974.

Denver Beanland, later to become Liberal leader and then Attorney-General, also stood in Everton only to be beaten by another oncer, Gerry Jones, from the ALP.

Some of the heat generated by the inter-coalition conflicts impacted on the Liberals themselves. Some sitting Liberals came under preselection pressure or threats of dis-endorsement. The Liberal Party state executive failed in a bid to withdraw endorsement from Charles Porter, who was popular with local branches but offside with some of the executive. Porter was reported to have told the selection council that his duty as a Liberal was 'to serve the party rather than agree with a small group in Cabinet'. And the executive had to go to strenuous lengths to defend the Health Minister, Doug Tooth, who had earned the ire of local Liberal branches. While most executive members strongly supported Tooth, most branches had voted against him. One Liberal member said he had not seen area selection council meetings so stacked with state executive members. A local Christian 'independent liberal', Ivan Alcorn, stood against Tooth but was unable to unseat the minister (although his intervention caused Tooth to come second in the primary vote). In the end, the Liberals ran an additional nine candidates, contesting 53 electorates.

The Premier also came under challenge from a conservative opponent again. *The Australian* (26 April 1972) reported:

A Kingaroy businessman is forming a new political party to challenge the Queensland Premier...Percy Edwards, a businessman and farmer, will oppose Mr Bjelke-Petersen for the seat of Barambah as the representative of the Greater Australia Moderate Party. Mr Bjelke-Petersen won Country Party endorsement for the seat 25 years ago when Edwards' father, the late J. B. Edwards, retired after 27 years as the area's representative in State Parliament [Nanango, 1920-47]. Mr Edwards ran against Mr Bjelke-Petersen in the 1963 State election as an independent Country Party candidate, but has become disillusioned with the party. 'The wrong people have got charge of the Country Party' he said. 'They are too interested now in big business and finance.'

Paradoxically, his ALP challenger praised the Premier's work, claiming 'Bjelke-Petersen had been a very good member for Barambah' (*Courier-Mail*, 9 March 1972).

The media was unsure how the electoral tide would turn. A poll result in February 1972 put the Premier's satisfaction rating at 55 per cent compared with 41 per cent who were dissatisfied. The *Sunday Sun* (16 February 1972) described this result as a 'shock vote in [the] State Poll', commenting that 'this must be the best reviver Premier Bjelke-Petersen has had for a long time—he

is rating unexpectedly high among Queensland voters' except among highly educated sections of the community. The *Telegraph* (10 April 1972) commented that this poll 'looks like the toughest battle for votes in 15 years'. In contrast, the *Courier-Mail* ran an editorial on 29 March suggesting 'voters are unpredictable, but with eight weeks to go to the State election on May 27, it seems unlikely that Queenslanders will change their Government—or should'. It argued that while 'it would be foolish to claim that the Bjelke-Petersen and Chalk coalition has been a perfect one...that bumpy period seems to have passed. Despite some rivalry, which is not at all unhealthy, the two parties and their leaders have been working well together.' It continued by assessing that 'disunity is more apparent in the ranks of the Government's opponents', and suggested that

apart from the three former Labor members refused endorsement, there undeniably are sections of the Opposition unhappy with the present militant domination of the party. They have reason... At the Merthyr and Maryborough by-elections Queenslanders showed their overwhelming disapproval of Labor support of Trades and Labor Council black bans imposed for non-industrial reasons... If electors returned a Labor Party with subservience to the Trades Hall (which, following endorsements, it has got), there could be even Government support for black bans and stoppages.

The editorial writer thought that the government had been responsive to criticism and had kept the state's finances well, but criticised the government for not having been more 'adventurous' in social policy.

The 1972 campaign was fought largely on the grounds of stability versus instability: an experienced incumbent team against a largely unknown and untried opponent. According to the Premier, the choice was 'between the present stable, progressive Government which had done an excellent job and was responsible solely to the electors, and a disunited Labor Party ruthlessly purged of its moderate men and which openly took orders from an outside body over which the electors had no control' (*Courier-Mail*, 4 May 1972). Certainly, Labor's internal difficulties hurt its cause, surfacing periodically and somewhat embarrassingly in the lead-up to the poll. Moreover, such disunity was largely self-inflicted.

Political campaigning was gradually becoming more professional and slick. Some reports talked of jazz bands and streamers thrown from balconies and stages. Another account described the Country Party's campaign, led by party secretary, Mike Evans, as an 'American-style political rally with bands, marching girls and beautiful hostesses' designed to create a 'dynamic display'. It continued:

A fanfare from a 16 piece 'big band' will open the rally at Brisbane's Crest Hotel as the Premier, Mr Bjelke-Petersen, enters through a guard of marching girls. Young Country Party girls dressed in black and white silk jerseys with a long front slit will escort each of the party's other 43 election candidates to the stage... 'Closed circuit television will be used to give candidates pointers on TV presentation, advertising experts will outline effective use of the media, public speaking training will be given' Mr Evans said.

All leaders made extensive campaign tours of Queensland throughout the campaign, with Chalk focusing on the south-eastern corner and the Darling Downs. The Coalition's policy speech was given in two parts in early May with Bjelke-Petersen delivering the opening salvo in Rockhampton. He said 'the Government would introduce new legislation on public safety', then added ominously: 'we intend to safeguard Queenslanders' rights against organised attempts to undermine them.' Because forces were trying to 'destroy the community's confidence in democratic institutions', he stressed: 'We regard "law" as meaning the protection of the rights of all in the community—and "order" as the orderly working of society' (*Courier Mail*, 4 May 1972). Among other things, he suggested that the proposed appointment of an ombudsman was another measure to protect the rights of the community. For good measure, he also announced the commitment to build a \$200 million power station at Gladstone.

More than 500 people heard the hour-long speech. Apparently, it was

the liveliest meeting of the campaign so far and there were persistent interjections. The Premier ignored most, but when an active interjector said: 'You need a Labor Government', the Premier said: 'Yes, to stagnate and go backwards'... The Premier said: 'I'll sum it up by saying that if you've a good job with a secure future, a car in the garage and you're thinking about a new house—you must be living in Queensland.' (*Courier Mail*, 4 May 1972)

He spent much of the address talking up improvements to roads and rail services.

Chalk's policy speech was delivered in Brisbane and emphasised promises including a preschool scheme for all children in state schools and better city transport, saying the government would set up an authority to rationalise all Brisbane public and private transport services. He was then left to outline the government's intention of reducing probate and succession duties. He became more passionate, however, when he said 'we will strenuously oppose mob violence in the streets' and 'preserve the right of every Queenslanders to go about his business unmolested by rioters and Communist inspired troublemakers'

(*Courier-Mail*, 5 May 1972). He also promised that the Liberal Party would become the dominant partner in the Coalition. To an earlier meeting, he was reported as stating: ‘the 1972 election should be the party’s best chance of all time to reach the senior position in the coalition Government. Let me say that in this campaign I aim to push that barrow and to push it hard for the Liberal Party’ (*Sunday Mail*, 23 April 1972).

Jack Houston described the Coalition’s policy speech as an ‘I’m alright Joe’ document. He labelled the Premier’s speech as an ‘exercise in inadequacy and complacency—a travelogue in triviality’. He claimed ‘most of the key promises in the speech on subjects such as education, health and water conservation are obvious and long overdue’ (*Courier-Mail*, 4 April 1972). Houston nominated local government as the big issue in the upcoming election, insisting the *Regional Planning Act* was ‘one of the worst Acts he had seen in State Parliament’ because it could nullify the legitimate actions of a local authority.

Labor plugged away at the uninspiring slogan ‘Labor plans to get things done Jack Houston’s way’. It appeared an empty and non-arousing slogan. The government countered that if a Labor government were ever to be elected it would not be Houston’s way at all. Instead, it charged that the QCE, with its strong Trades Hall connections, would dictate Labor policy from outside the Parliament. Labor tried to make an issue of the government’s overseas-oriented state development program, claiming ‘you are selling us out’. It also claimed that Queensland was squandering its coal reserves and letting the ‘black gold’ go at throw-away prices. It conceded, however, that the state was getting a good deal by way of money in rail freight charges and other fringe benefits.

After all the posturing, the final result pretty much maintained the status quo. The Coalition secured 42.23 per cent of the vote (down by 2.5 from 1969) to the ALP’s 46.75 per cent (up 2 per cent). This was Labor’s highest vote since Vince Gair was leader in 1956. In terms of seats, the Coalition held 47 with 26 to the Country Party and 21 to the Liberals. Labor managed just 33 seats—after some of their glamour candidates (such as Aldermen Clem Jones, Bryan Walsh and Ian Brusasco) failed to impress in the state poll. Two independents were returned: Ed Casey in Mackay and Tom Aikens in Townsville South. Some notable politicians who later became significant players entered the Parliament at the 1972 election, including: Tom Burns (ALP, Lytton, and ALP federal president), Bill Gunn (CP, Somerset), Bill D’Arcy (ALP, Albert), Dr Llew Edwards (Lib., Ipswich), Kev Hooper (ALP, Archerfield), Don Neal (CP, Balonne), Lindsay Hartwig (CP, Callide), Bruce Small (CP, Surfers Paradise, who came third in the primary vote but took the seat on a knife edge with Liberal preferences), Norman Scott-Young (Lib., Townsville) and Edward (Ted) Row (CP, Hinchinbrook, the son of the

retiring minister, John Row). A couple of well-known but one-time members also made an appearance, such as the anti-apartheid campaigner Gerry Jones (ALP, Everton) and Roy Harvey (ALP, Stafford), later Lord Mayor of Brisbane.

While the government claimed its victory was the result of its sound record in the past 15 years, Labor blamed its loss yet again on the 'gerrymander'. The Premier revelled in his victory, saying: 'we are not concerned at the low percentage. We are only concerned with seats. The Country Party as always received a low percentage in Queensland. It is the tradition. We are satisfied we will be the government. Labor and socialism have been halted again' (*Sunday Sun*, 28 May 1972). Houston replied in the same paper that the 'gerrymander was far worse for Labor than I had anticipated' and added 'it is a queer kind of democracy where a party gets 48 percent of the vote and does not look like being the government'. Tom Burns called for a referendum in Queensland to test whether proportional representation should be adopted.

The last of the high-water mark

The election of 1972 was Labor's high-water mark in terms of votes received and seats won. It did not exceed this milestone until it finally won office in 1989 after 32 consecutive years in opposition. The next decade or so was marked by divisiveness, disastrous decisions and serial disappointments for state Labor. Their plight was brought on by their own misfortunes, but also by Queensland's subsequent antipathy to the Whitlam federal government. More than anything, however, their fate was sealed by the astute and relentless politicking of Bjelke-Petersen, who exploited their every weakness. Soon Labor would be reduced to a pitiful rump in the Parliament, almost unable to form a viable opposition.

On the conservative side of politics, the Coalition had seen off a difficult couple of years and its fortunes were about to improve greatly. After a difficult and unruly baptism as Premier, Bjelke-Petersen had now won two straight elections and had a clear mandate in this own right. He had seen off the doubters on his own front and backbenches and proved he could win the all-important electoral contests. He had experimented with novel campaigning techniques and jazzed up his party's appeal—a tactic that probably reduced his potential losses rather than won him many new votes. More significantly into the future, he had learned the importance of displaying unity and cohesion in contrast with one's political opponents—especially if they appeared divided or unstable. Having run a law and order campaign from 1971, the Premier had seen how to divide his political opponents and magnify their weaknesses. Gradually, he became merciless in the pursuit of political advantage. The 1972 election result

and the lessons of that campaign became a watershed for the Bjelke-Petersen government, which went on to politically annihilate parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition to its rule.