

10. Commanding the Parliament, 1972–1975

The fortieth Parliament began its first session on 1 August 1972. It would run until 1 November 1974, sitting for 193 days in the two and a half years it existed. Fifteen new members made their appearance in the House—almost one-fifth of the Assembly. They included, from the ALP: Tom Burns, Bill D’Arcy, Roy Harvey, Kevin Hooper, Gerry Jones, Ken Leese and Les Yewdale; from the Country Party: Des Frawley, Bill Gunn, Lindsay Hartwig, Donald Neal, Ted Row and Bruce Small; and from the Liberal Party: Dr Llewellyn Edwards and Dr Norman Scott-Young.

The Country–Liberal Coalition had been in office for 15 years and was starting to become more than a little cocky in government. There were occasional telltale signs in the Parliament during question time or in debates in which ministers were summarily dismissive of opposition concerns. While the government’s electoral position was not threatened, there was evidence of seething tensions brewing within the Coalition itself. These tensions would gradually increase during the 1970s, leading to an eventual breakdown of the Coalition in early 1983.

The third Bjelke–Petersen ministry was sworn in on 20 June. It consisted of 14 ministers, again split eight to the Country Party and six to the Liberals. The Transport Minister, Bill Knox, a businessman by profession, was promoted to the vacant Attorney-General’s portfolio. Vic Sullivan took over the vacant Primary Industries portfolio and two new members were elevated into the ministry: Keith Hooper (Lib., Greenslopes) and Henry McKechnie (CP, Carnarvon). A few strange portfolio combinations were announced, suggesting that the government was conscious of the emerging importance of new policy sectors but not prepared to establish these as full departments under a dedicated minister. A new portfolio of Tourism, Sport and Welfare Services (!) was established, as was one for Conservation, Marine and Aboriginal Affairs (!)—both an eclectic mix of responsibilities.

The full ministry was

- Premier: Johannes Bjelke-Petersen, CP
- Treasurer: Gordon Chalk, Lib.
- Minister for Mines and Main Roads: Ronald Camm, CP
- Minister for Justice and Attorney-General: William Knox, Lib.

- Minister for Education and Cultural Activities: Alan Fletcher, CP
- Minister for Health: Doug Tooth, Lib.
- Minister for Tourism, Sport and Welfare Services: John Herbert, Lib.
- Minister for Development and Industrial Affairs: Fred Campbell, Lib.
- Minister for Primary Industries: Vic Sullivan, CP
- Minister for Works and Housing: Max Hodges, CP
- Minister for Conservation, Marine and Aboriginal Affairs: Neville Hewitt, CP
- Minister for Lands and Forestry: Wally Rae, CP
- Minister for Transport: Keith Hooper, Lib.
- Minister for Local Government and Electricity: Henry McKechnie, CP

The unseemly tussle over the election of the new Speaker

With the retirement of Sir David Nicholson, the Assembly had to elect a new Speaker, as was customary practice. The Country Party members were, however, divided as to whom they would support. On the first day back, Vic Sullivan moved that Jim Houghton take the chair. His motion was seconded by Mike Ahern, the new parliamentary secretary of the Country Party, who stated that the reason he had so moved was because ‘I know him to be the best man for the job...For the office of Speaker he has received the nomination of the Parliamentary Country Party unopposed, and his nomination was endorsed at a meeting of the joint Government parties, again unopposed’ (*QPD* 1972:vol. 259, p. 3).

Despite Houghton having already moved into the Speaker’s office, putting a sign on the door calling himself the ‘Speaker elect’ and commandeering the Speaker’s car and chauffeur, two Country Party members—Roy Armstrong (Mulgrave) and Val Bird (Burdekin)—then nominated ‘Bugger-em’ Bill Lonergan because he represented a northern electorate. Lonergan had been elected party whip, but announced he would stand for the Speakership on the floor of the Parliament. Some Country Party members were angry that there were no ministers representing north Queensland (with no-one north of Whitsunday, held by Ron Camm). Sensing the government was split over its preferred nominee, Labor chose—instead of nominating its own candidate—to complain about the lack of meetings of the standing committees before trying to seek assurances that new furniture that had been delivered to the Parliament would be made available to the opposition (Ah! Ever people of principle!). Jack Houston said that Labor did not support Houghton because we ‘are not keen on having Jim Houghton, or anybody else, barking at us from the chair’ (in a none too subtle reference

to his ‘mangy dog’ statement when he was an independent and before he was a member of the Country Party) (*QPD* 1972:vol. 259, p. 5). Houston supported Lonergan because he believed he would ‘convene meetings of the standing committees’ and stand up for ‘principles that he believes are right’. The debate proceeded but more than an hour later, Lonergan won the ‘secret ballot’ by 47 votes to 32, with three informal votes. There was speculation that a few Country Party members, and quite a few Liberals, voted for Lonergan (with the Liberals voting against Houghton because of his previous treachery). This was the only time in the period of the Coalition government that there was a formal challenge to the government’s nominee from within its own side. Liberal Party President, Robert Sparkes, ‘voiced his disapproval’ over the actions of the breakaway members, accusing them of breaking the ‘basic principles of party solidarity’ and threatening ‘disciplinary action’ (*AJPH* 1972:vol. 427).

As Speaker, Lonergan seemed reluctant to accept frequent interjections and kept calling for order and for members to reduce the level of noise, even from among the government’s own members such as Russ Hinze. Within days, he was struggling with interjections, insisting: ‘Order! I am in control of the House. I do not want any advice on how I should control it’ (*QPD* 1972:vol. 259, p. 144). He would later attract much criticism for his partisanship and his ‘biased’ rulings and be accused of unnecessarily evicting Labor members in debate. At one stage when defending one of his rulings, Lonergan let slip his attitude to parliamentary politics by stating ‘after all, politics is not a Sunday-school picnic, and honourable members must expect a little rough and tumble’ (*QPD* 1973:vol. 261, p. 2934). His deputy and Chairman of Committees was Bill Lickiss. More importantly, Labor nominated Vi Jordan (Ipswich West) as one of the panel of deputy speakers, making her the first female deputy speaker in Queensland. Subsequently, according to one of the Liberal members who made a speech on the role of women in the Parliament, Jordan became

the first woman to preside over an Australian Parliament, notwithstanding that a few months later the Victorians, who are always trying to take our historical claims away from us, said that Mrs Edna Roper had presided over a Committee...[but] Mrs Jordan certainly has that small claim to history. (Bill Hewitt, in *QPD* 1975:vol. 267, pp. 464–5)

The date was most likely 12 October 1972, and the House was debating the supply bill.

The Governor’s address contained the usual list of parish-pump spending proposals: new dams, new hospital wards, new trains, aged-person nursing homes, technical colleges, farm support packages, more police and a new police academy, new wharves and coastal groynes to be built. The government planned to introduce legislation to appoint an ombudsman, to amend succession duties

and workers' compensation laws and to regulate tow trucks. It also planned to introduce politically inspired electoral changes to the *Brisbane City Council Act* to reduce the number of wards and have the Lord Mayor elected by the aldermen rather than elected-at-large (a supposedly 'get Clem' move in retaliation against Clem Jones standing at the state election of 1972).

Once the proposed measures were disclosed, the Labor Party produced a petition to the Assembly signed by 18 085 electors 'praying that the Parliament of Queensland' will 'set up a referendum of electors to decide whether or not any alteration is desired in the election of the Brisbane City Council and the Lord Mayor' (*QPD* 1972:vol. 259, p. 236). Houston claimed in the subsequent debate that the bill was full of 'piffle' and that it would go down in history as 'McKechnie's folly', named after the new Minister for Local Government. When the bill came to a vote, the Country Party's Jim Houghton distinguished himself by stating he would vote against the government's proposal; he was impressed with Clem Jones and he believed 'insanity has taken over democracy' (*QPD* 1972:vol. 259, p. 270). Some on the government's benches felt that Houghton spoke against the bill out of sour grapes because he had not secured the Speakership. In the end, at 1.25 am, after a mammoth series of amendments requiring 23 divisions at the second reading stage, the bill was passed by 42–32 votes. Houghton declined to vote and abstained along with five other members (Aikens, Casey, Hughes, Lickiss and Tooth. Percy Tucker was also absent because he had been suspended earlier in the proceedings).

The debate on the *City of Brisbane Act Amendment Act* occupied some 137 pages in *Hansard*, suggesting the heat of the issue and the importance politicians attached to their own electoral interests. During the early stages of the debate, the vituperative Aikens reminded the House of the parochial nature of Queensland politics when he confessed:

I do not care very much what happens to this great big rat-ridden, overgrown dump of a city called Brisbane. As far as I am concerned, it can slide into the Brisbane River any day it likes. It would not be missed by the useful people of the back country, because the people of Brisbane have fattened and battened on us for years. Without the people of the back country, Brisbane would still be a collection of bag and bark humpies along the Brisbane River. (*QPD* 1972:vol. 259, p. 257)

Aikens made his passionate speech because he believed Brisbane was corrupt. He felt it was about time various land scandals were exposed and he believed that the council was led by a one-man-band, Clem Jones, who had degraded services rather than improved them. He made the telling point that Queensland operated under two local government acts: a special one for the City of Brisbane and one for the rest of Queensland. He agreed that mayors ought to be elected

by the aldermen—as was the case throughout the state except for Brisbane. He indicated he supported the City of Brisbane Amendment Bill because it brought the capital into line with the remainder of the state. When the voting was conducted, however, Aikens was a notable abstention or absentee.

A number of Labor speakers made reference to the fact that the new Minister for Local Government, Henry McKechnie, had publicly admitted that he was motivated to bring forward the bill partly because disgruntled taxidriviers had complained to him about conditions in Brisbane. In a quirky moment, Labor's Doug Sherrington revealed his 'latent poetic talent' when he dedicated the following poem to the minister after hearing that local taxidriviers had told him to 'fix Jones'. Sherrington recited:

Henry, dear Henry, come home with me now;
The clock in the town hall strikes one.

Your taxi-man's waiting to give you advice,
On just how old Clem should be done.

What matters the fact that the public object,
What matters the Press tans my hide,

The taxi-men tell me that Clem's got to go,
So you've just got to keep them on side.

Though Sparkes and his crew say I'm making a blue,
And say it's a ruddy poor show,

The taxi-men tell me that Clem's got to go,
And who am I to say no?

The amendment may stink, and I could be a fink,
But I always can look back with pride,

And with hillbilly logic, the city I wrecked,
And the taxi-men stood by my side.

So, Henry, dear Henry, your day's work is done,
You're now firm favourite with Joh.

You'll go down in history as the bloke in the cab,
Who just really couldn't say no. (*QPD* 1972:vol. 259, p. 282)

The day after the vote on the Brisbane City Bill was taken, Houston challenged the Speaker's ruling the previous night that declared material Houston had alluded to in the debate the day before was out of order and could not be raised. Houston's challenge was made on the grounds that Speaker Lonergan had not shown the appropriate leniency and tolerance in curtailing the debate and that

he had not abided by the principles laid down in Erskine May's *Parliamentary Practice*. His dissent motion got nowhere, however, and the challenge to the Speaker's ruling was lost on party lines, with 30 Labor 'ayes' to 42 Coalition 'noes'.

Other early debates were largely interwoven with Labor's constant complaints against the electoral redistribution and the 'gerrymander'. Houston moved a motion against the Address in Reply, claiming the government did not have the confidence of the House because it had

failed to provide a fair and impartial redistribution to enable the election of a Government in accordance with the true wishes and desires of the community...and [because] the Country Party, gained the least number of valid votes cast for all the major parties, yet maintained its seniority with a mere 20 percent of the vote. (*QPD* 1972:vol. 259, pp. 53–4)

Again, he got nowhere.

Interestingly, during 1972, citizens also began to look at the diligence and performance of their politicians. A consumer protection group called Campaign Against Resting Politicians (CARP, sometimes recycled by its leader as Campaign Against Rising Prices), led by consumer activist Vilma Ward, set itself the task of reporting on the performance or lack of performance of politicians—with CARP members occasionally sitting in the public gallery and holding regular meetings to swap information and compile dossiers. This initiative, which many Coalitionists considered a union or Labor stunt, angered Hinze and really got his blood up. Using colourful language, he called their monitoring 'pimping on politicians'. So irate did he become that he departed from the business of the Address in Reply to have a go at Ward:

It is a pity that Vilma Ward would not come in here and say what she wants to say instead of pimping on politicians. A lot she would know about us, anyhow...When I was asked 'Will you go on *This Day Tonight* with Vilma Ward?', I said, 'I would love to have such an opportunity. Let us see how good she is'. But, of course, she could not be found anywhere in Brisbane once she heard that I was going to give her a little bit of a 'touch-up'. The person who made the approach from *This Day Tonight* said, 'Never mind, Russ, she'll keep'...as far as I am concerned, anyone who sits in the gallery and takes notes and pimps on members can go to hell. The people of the South Coast electorate put me here originally...they are the only ones of whom I take any notice. (*QPD* 1972:vol. 259, pp. 123–4)

Usually an unapologetic bully, Hinze later showed his more humorous side when he defended his party's policy of defending marine mammals in coastal

waters. On the one hand, he argued that wild dolphins deserved compassion and should be protected, but, on the other, he approved of keeping them in captivity at marine parks similar to Marineland on the Gold Coast. As someone not small of girth, he shared a personal moment with members:

Mr Hinze: No doubt honourable members have seen the excellent photograph in today's issue of 'The Australian', which shows that, as proof of my love for these wonderful creatures, I jumped into the pool with them. I know some people might have trouble in distinguishing the dolphin from me.

[Interjection from] *Mr F. P. Moore:* You should have worn your glasses.

Mr Hinze: I should have had my glasses on. (*QPD* 1972:vol. 259, p. 129)

Subsequently, the Minister for Justice, Bill Knox, was asked a question without notice by Hinze suggesting that Vilma Ward was not qualified to advise on the quality of any consumer product. Knox responded by saying that he did not know Ward personally, but thought that it was unusual for someone purporting to be an independent authority in the community to then endorse particular commercial products (such as potato chips). He considered it undermined her bona fides to spruik for particular brands. Those in the Parliament treated such incidents as light relief, but in reality it was an early inkling that Queenslanders were gradually expecting better of their politicians and were prepared to do something about it themselves.

Handcuffing the puppets of the executive: the momentum for reform flickers

Many of the new members made their maiden speeches in the Address in Reply. One noted speech was from Tom Burns, the former state secretary and federal president of the ALP (*QPD* 1972:vol. 259, pp. 486–95). Against the prevailing custom, the speech was interrupted by numerous interjections, including some from the heavyweights Joh Bjelke-Petersen and Ron Camm. Burns blasted the government for 'handcuffing' the Parliament and for keeping it endlessly in recess. He argued the government was not providing adequate resources to the Parliament and that the government was hiding behind an armour of secrecy. He ventured that cabinet was dominated by seniority and that government press secretaries put words in the mouths of ministers and were writing speeches for government backbenchers. It was a trenchant critique. He also accused Bjelke-Petersen of being an associate of a stockfeed merchant who had defrauded

the state of \$100 000 from drought relief funds, but whose ‘trial’ was held in secret in the Treasury Building. He finished his maiden speech by making six suggestions for parliamentary reform—namely

- joint parliamentary committees on issues of public importance
- provision for private members’ bills
- relaxation of *Standing Orders* to permit urgency debates on questions of public interest
- changes to *Standing Orders* so that questions on notice were tabled in writing one day and answers tabled again in writing on the next day
- joint standing parliamentary committees on administrative aspects, such as public accounts and public works
- extension of research and secretarial assistance available to members.

While Bjelke-Petersen returned to the Chamber to make Burns withdraw his statement concerning the stockfeed merchant (which Burns did), the next speaker, Claude Wharton (CP, Burnett), asserted he had never heard such political piffle in his life. This was, however, one of the first major calls made by Labor in the postwar period for the explicit establishment of a public accounts committee and other institutional reforms to parliament. It began an era in which parliamentary reform itself became of increasing concern not only to the Labor opposition but to many Liberal backbenchers, media commentators and reform-minded interest groups. Only a month later, Geoff Chinchin (Lib., Mount Gravatt) argued that a public accounts committee helps members ‘determine whether money is spent wisely’ (*QPD* 1972:vol. 259, p. 972). He urged the Queensland Parliament to establish such a committee because backbenchers had considerable trouble finding out what was going on from the estimates debates (and even those dealt with only half the departments each year). Chinchin argued that the Parliament could not rely on the Auditor-General to ascertain whether spending was ‘wise’ as opposed to expended properly, so a public accounts committee was essential to place the Parliament back in control of spending. He stated:

As members, we must have much more control. This can only be done through a public accounts committee. This would establish the supremacy of Parliament over executive Government. Surely this is our job. Such a committee is not a policy-making body; it operates within the Government’s policy. It would be a means of allowing members to feel that they were playing their part in the expenditure of money, which is a most important area of Government. It would allow members to be satisfied in their own minds that money was being spent wisely. (*QPD* 1972:vol. 259, p. 975)

Earlier, in the previous Parliament, following Jack Pizzey's supposed support for a subordinate legislation committee, Bill Hewitt had called for the introduction of 'all-party parliamentary committees' to investigate social problems and policy-related matters (see Chapters 7 and 9). He had also suggested the establishment of an estimates committee along the lines of the Senate's estimates committee. He was supported by other Liberals over the next few years, including John Murray, but opposed by others less interested in transparency, such as Don Lane. When Murray called for 'all-party committees' in 1973, he said that 'when members from both sides of the House serve on these committees, there is an extraordinary absence of political bias...in the main, committee members rise above fighting on party-political lines'. His fellow Liberal Don Lane, however, interjected: 'how naive can you get!' (*QPD* 1973:vol. 263, p. 2078).

In late 1972, the government agreed to allow the establishment of a privileges and regulations parliamentary committee following the recommendations of a 'parliamentary investigating committee' chaired by Mike Ahern and with Keith Wright's support. The privileges committee must not have been a priority, however, as it was not officially established until April 1976—three and a half years later. In 1972, the government ruled out the establishment of a public accounts committee and a public works committee despite pressure from some members.

Hewitt continued his interest in improving parliamentary procedures, giving a speech on 6 December 1972 highly critical of the wasteful and inefficient procedures of the House, which allowed meaningless debates to 'drag on interminably'. The *Standing Orders*, he claimed, were 'soul-destroying' and did 'nothing to uplift the parliamentary institution'; rather they served to 'drag it down into a morass of senseless, useless verbiage that makes the parliamentary proceedings dull and stultifying' (*QPD* 1972:vol. 260, p. 2370). He suggested shortening the Address in Reply to make it punchier, shortening estimates debates undertaken by the House (committee of the whole) and economising over speeches introducing new legislation especially given before the members were presented with the actual bills. He was concerned to economise on time, while making proceedings flow more smoothly. To do this, he called for the Standing Orders Committee to meet and review all procedures, warning:

There is a ground swell of opinion among honourable members that our procedures are not good enough...It is our task to administer the affairs of this State efficiently and well. How can we be seen to do that when our own procedures are more in keeping with those of a bygone age? (*QPD* 1972:vol. 260, p. 2371)

The government did occasionally act on this sentiment, as it did in late 1972 when it cut the time allowed for speeches on the supply debate from 25 minutes

to 20 minutes—a measure that had the opposition incensed. The government also extended the sitting hours late in 1972 to include Tuesday and Thursday nights, Wednesday afternoons and Fridays. It also reaffirmed the dress code of the Parliament after Don Dunstan famously wore pink hotpants into the South Australian Parliament (as a ‘dare’ he had made with his then partner). With tongue in cheek, Clive Hughes (Lib., Kurilpa) asked the Deputy Premier whether the Queensland Labor members ought to be permitted to adopt a similar style of attire in the local Parliament. Gordon Chalk played a straight bat saying that ‘the style of dress worn by the Premier of South Australia lowers the dignity of the Parliament’. He favoured the traditional dress code that had been used by the Queensland Parliament since its inception—‘namely, shirt, trousers, coat and tie’; there was no mention of female attire (*QPD* 1972:vol. 260, p. 1966)! When Jack Melloy wore a safari suit, his attire was deemed unsuitable and he was asked to withdraw.

Four Labor members ‘suspended’ by the chair (or by the Premier); then Lane is evicted

Four members were excluded from the Chamber in October 1972 over so-called ‘grossly disorderly behaviour’. They were all Labor members but their behaviour did not appear any more disorderly than that of their government counterparts. Three were ordered by the chair (the Deputy Speaker or Acting Chairman) to ‘withdraw’ themselves from the Chamber under *Standing Order 123A* (they had to leave for the rest of the day but could return the next). They were Doug Sherrington, Tom Burns and Fred Bromley. Bromley and Sherrington were perennial offenders and were regularly thrown out for clashing with the Speaker; Sherrington was again evicted a few days later for calling Chalk a ‘ratbag’, as was Bromley a short while later. Another Labor member, Gerry Jones, was also named and then suspended for seven days on a motion from the Premier, which was passed by 33 votes to 26. Finally, Don Lane (Lib., Merthyr) was expelled for a day on the penultimate sitting day of 1972.

The expulsion incidents blew up over a series of heated exchanges supposedly relating to the supply debate, held after the dinner recess in the evening of 26 October—no doubt after a few members had been drinking during dinner time. Most of the initial acrimony was between Brian Davis (ALP, Brisbane) and Lane over Lane supposedly spying on trade unions when he was with the police’s Special Branch. With Bill Hewitt in the chair, the Chamber descended into personal abuse and invective, with, among other things, Lane accusing Davis of stealing hub caps and Davis calling Lane a ‘pimp and a police stooge’. The ‘debate’ then drifted to conflicts of interest involving Bruce Small (CP,

Surfers Paradise and Mayor of the Gold Coast) and suspicious land sales from his company to the council and the takeover of land on the coast by foreign interests who allegedly used Small as a facilitator. Hewitt was then replaced in the chair by Claude Wharton (CP, Burnett), who tried to refocus the debate back onto the budget. After a rash of interjections, Sherrington was ejected after being warned (a warning he received by stating ‘the honourable member for Merthyr has been interjecting all night. He can do as he likes’). Burns was then expelled (by Hewitt this time) for interjecting that Bruce Small was ‘still an old crook’. Hewitt then asked Gerry Jones (ALP, Everton) to withdraw from the Chamber for disobeying the chair’s rulings, but Jones, who was a new member, refused to go immediately, saying he had only sat in the Chamber for three weeks and ‘have not been allowed to open my mouth’. When Hewitt threatened to name him, he said: ‘Name me.’ With Lonergan as Speaker in the chair, Jones was then named and suspended. Finally, Fred Bromley was expelled when he responded to the Treasurer’s plea to return to a ‘more serious side of the debate (if one can describe it as a debate)’ with the interjection: ‘excuse me while I go out and vomit’ (*QPD* 1972:vol. 260, p. 1384). Hewitt, back in the chair, then asked him to leave. Bromley apparently left the main chamber but lurked around outside in the corridor; he later re-entered the Chamber, claiming that the Acting Chairman had instructed him to ‘withdraw’ not in fact leave the Chamber. The incident finished with an almost-Lewis Carroll moment:

The Acting Chairman: Order! The honourable member for South Brisbane was ordered to withdraw from the Chamber earlier this evening. I now ask him to leave the Chamber.

Mr Bromley: I was outside the Chamber.

The Acting Chairman: Order! I ordered the honourable member to withdraw, and I stand by my ruling.

Mr Bromley: I disagree, Mr Hewitt. I was outside the Chamber.

The Acting Chairman: Order! I do not intend to debate my ruling. My interpretation is that I ordered the honourable member to withdraw, and I now ask him to leave the Chamber.

Mr Bromley: I was outside the Chamber.

Sir Gordon Chalk: I do not propose to speak on this matter.

Mr Bromley: You can’t throw me out.

The Acting Chairman: Order! I ordered the honourable member to withdraw earlier in the evening. I again order him, for the last time, to withdraw from the Chamber.

Mr Bromley: I will withdraw, but I don't think you did order me out of the Chamber.

The Acting Chairman: Order! I do not intend to debate my ruling. Will the honourable member leave the Chamber, or do I have to name him?

Mr Bromley: I don't care what you do.

The Acting Chairman: Order! The honourable member will leave the Chamber.

[Whereupon the honourable member for South Brisbane withdrew from the Chamber.] (*QPD* 1972:vol. 260, pp. 1394–5)

The pathetic incident caused subsequent comment in the media, with *The Australian* (30 October 1972) reporting that the incident showed the government was losing control of the House but was also guilty of abusing its power over the opposition. The newspaper commented that Labor MPs were right to be 'bitter about the suspension of four of their number', that they were 'treated unfairly' and that it was 'unfortunate too, that the Premier, Mr Bjelke-Petersen, bought into the argument'. It ventured: 'his statements that he will take severe action again could lead to the belief that the Premier, and not the Speaker, Mr Lonergan, is in charge of the House.' Partly in response to such negative press reports, Lonergan excluded Don Lane for a day on the evening before the last sitting day of the year. Lane was fast gaining a reputation as a 'political bruiser' who showed considerable animosity towards the opposition (feelings that were mutual). He was ordered out because he constantly crossed swords with the Speaker and had been constantly interjecting, although he complained he was being gagged in debate. Lane left the Chamber without incident, but did not recount the incident in his memoirs.

Although Charles Porter rose to complain about *The Australian's* coverage of this matter as an issue of privilege the following week, this was the first time that Bjelke-Petersen was accused of ruling the Parliament with an iron fist (*QPD* 1972:vol. 260, p. 1427). Then, without a hint of irony or hypocrisy, at the adjournment of the Parliament for the summer break, the Premier thanked the Speaker and the various chairmen of committees 'for their valuable role of ensuring proper conduct while the House is in Committee' (*QPD* 1972:vol. 260, p. 2635).

Matters of less public importance

Speaking on a 'matter of public interest', Tom Burns raised the issue of the conversion to metric measurements, complaining it 'will affect all our lives'.

Burns went on to say it would impact on people from the cradle to the grave, reporting in all earnestness that a grave now dug to six feet would have to be dug to two metres, costing more in fees for bereaved families! He asked somewhat poignantly: ‘what benefits will the average Australian housewife and worker derive from metrication?’ (*QPD* 1972:vol. 259, p. 756). He called for the state consumer protection body to be given the power to control prices to stop business increasing the price of goods (or reducing the contents) in the changeover period.

The issue of creating new states within Queensland surfaced again after the Premier made statements to the press to the effect that the government was giving consideration to a new state in north Queensland. His statements came about because, along with Gordon Chalk and Jack Houston, the Premier had attended a conference on constitutional matters involving the Commonwealth and state governments. The Queensland government had proposed listing new states on the agenda for a forthcoming constitutional convention, but was having difficulty convincing other state governments to support this bid. In the Parliament, Bill Wood (ALP, Barron River) asked the Premier whether all the views of north Queensland would be listened to and not just the advocates of the North Queensland Self-Government League based in Townsville. The Premier replied:

The whole question of the division of Queensland into a number of States has been discussed by Cabinet on a number of occasions. Our legal advisers, as we have informed those in the North who are particularly interested in this matter, are of the opinion that complete agreement would be required between the Commonwealth and all the other States on the suggested establishment of a new State. The responsibility for organising or arranging something of this nature is in the hands of the Commonwealth...I will be calling for views and expressions of opinion from all people and organisations, wherever they may be. That is a natural consequence of holding such a convention. (*QPD* 1972:vol. 259, p. 826)

The issue lost salience for the government after 1972 and was swept aside by other political conflicts with the Commonwealth after Labor’s Gough Whitlam won office.

Finances and superannuation

Gordon Chalk presented his seventh financial statement to the Parliament in September 1972. He was most proud that the state’s finances had miraculously turned around. The state’s income for the past year was \$595 million compared

with spending of \$592.3 million—leaving a surplus of \$2.7 million instead of the projected deficit of \$7 million. The result was achieved after the injection of \$9 million from the Commonwealth Grants Commission together with higher revenue returns (some \$31 million higher than expected) and expenditures held fairly constant. Revenues were increasing sharply because of the booming nature of the state's economy. The budget for 1972/73 increased expenditure by \$107 million to \$679 million—an increase of 18 per cent in one year. Revenues were expected to increase to \$674 million or 14.1 per cent, meaning a slight deficit was projected. Chalk told the House:

When the accumulated surplus of \$2,711,919 brought forward from 1971–72 is taken into account, the accumulated position at 30th June next is expected to be a deficit of \$1,897,788. In anticipation of the receipt of Grants Commission completion grants for 1971–72 and 1972–73 in subsequent financial years, I am satisfied the State can prudentially budget accordingly. (*QPD* 1972:vol. 259, p. 799)

He forecast no increase in the rates of taxation or in rail freight charges, which were very profitable for the state, especially from the mining companies in central Queensland. Reactions to the budget were not so fulsome from the opposition. Jack Houston described the financial statement as a 'Budgerigar Budget': 'it talks well; it has colour, but, instead of taking the forward look of statesmanship, it is caged in the opportunism of politics' (*QPD* 1972:vol. 259, p. 827). Percy Tucker also bought into the debate, pointing out that the Commonwealth Treasury had questioned the validity of the state's figures it used in making its submission to the Grants Commission. Tucker alleged that Queensland had won \$9 million not because of Chalk's submission, but because an election had been pending. The debate continued, with Tucker suggesting:

If the Queensland Government presented such a slovenly and inept submission in our hour of greatest need—and it was an hour of greatest need—what of the previous submissions made over the years...In the past five years Queensland would have received, on a per capita basis, which is applied to South Australia, not \$9,000,000 but an extra \$123,500,000. When the Treasurer managed to get \$9,000,000 he came back and held it aloft, but he hid the fact that, because of his poor presentation, Queensland has lost many millions of dollars over the past five years.

Sir Gordon Chalk: You are sillier than I thought you were. You are completely off the beam.

Mr Tucker: Now the Treasurer is frightened.

Sir Gordon Chalk: I am not frightened of you. I will deal with you later.

Mr Tucker: I am not worried about that. This clearly demonstrates how the Federal Government has exploited the incompetence of the Government. If the Treasurer is not worried about it, he is making a lot of noise.

Sir Gordon Chalk: I am worried because you are misleading the people of Queensland with such stupidity. (*QPD* 1972:vol. 259, p. 851)

And, so it went. Tucker also said it was clear that the people of north Queensland ‘want to escape from the Government led by the Premier and the Treasurer’, adding that if a new state were to be established in north Queensland it would be governed by Labor and he would ‘certainly do my best to influence a Labor Government to renegotiate every rotten mineral contract let in the North’ (*QPD* 1972:vol. 259, p. 851). Chalk, it seems, was doing precisely this and, to help balance the next year’s budget, he announced a new deal over mining royalties had been agreed with the companies, which would generate an additional \$28 million.

A new public service superannuation scheme was introduced, replacing the older scheme, which had become too costly to older workers. The new ‘defined benefit’ scheme (applying to public employees including teachers) required contributions rising from 2 per cent to 6.5 per cent of salary after thirty-five years of age, and provided benefits of up to forty-five sixtieths of the average salary over the last three years of service. It was a pioneering scheme in that Queensland unlike the other states established a fully funded scheme so that it would not constitute a liability to future taxpayers; in 1972–73, this required an additional subsidy of \$3 million.

Fighting the ‘communist evils’ of Canberra

With the election of the federal Whitlam Labor government in December 1972, the Queensland Premier emerged as one of the staunchest critics of this administration. He opposed almost everything the federal Labor government proposed while resorting to various forms of subterfuge and isolationist tactics to unsettle the new leader. As Chalk would later recall, ‘Joh had an obsession about Whitlam’ and the ‘longer Whitlam remained as Prime Minister, the more “Joh’s hatred of him grew”’ (Hazlehurst 1987:269). Bjelke-Petersen particularly honed in on the fears and anxieties of parochial Queenslanders, playing up fears of a socialist centralisation and the drift towards republicanism (Townsend 1983:346). He talked of secession, of Queensland going it alone, of making the

monarch the ‘Queen of Queensland’ to forestall any move towards a republic.¹ More generally, he began a relentless ‘anti-Whitlam’ campaign, denigrating everything that emanated from centralist Canberra—labelling them ‘communists in Canberra’ and immoral evildoers. Bjelke-Petersen called Whitlam a ‘dictator’ who should ‘remember he is not a feudal lord’ (*QPD* 1973:vol. 262, pp. 78–9). He constantly goaded the local ALP, accusing it of being anti-Queensland, asking its members whether ‘they stand on the side of Canberra, or on the side of Queensland and loyal fellow-Queenslanders?’ (*QPD* 1973:vol. 261, p. 2652).

Bjelke-Petersen began a conscious campaign to carve out a more strident and independent image for the state and for himself as a conservative leader of national and international standing. He undertook an ambitious (and expensive) international tour of London, Tokyo and Washington, meeting various bodies but also conducting extensive media interviews for home consumption (which became a talking point in itself). When asked in the Parliament by Percy Tucker who he had met while overseas, the Premier replied elliptically, ‘many important people’—to which Fred Newton replied ‘name one’ (*QPD* 1973:vol. 262, p. 8). He claimed he had spoken to the US Ambassador and ‘many other important people in Washington’, where he had done ‘everything in [his] power to counter the attitude being adopted by many people as a result of the Federal Government’s actions’ (*QPD* 1973:vol. 262, p. 8). He also built up the capacities of his own department, which increased its budget vote from \$2 million in 1968 to \$5.5 million in 1973/74. Much of this increase was devoted to additional staff, but some was spent on the Premier’s government jet, which he used frequently and which became a sore point with the opposition. At times, the opposition criticised his extravagance and complained loudly if he was ‘flying around the state’ when he should be attending parliament. At other times, it argued that if the government cared about democracy it would ‘give the Opposition the plane on an equal basis and for equal time to tour the State’ (*QPD* 1973:vol. 263, p. 2108). When frequently asked about his use (or misuse) of the government’s jet, Bjelke-Petersen, however, would turn the issue around and accuse the opposition of not always using their entitlements for the purposes for which they were intended. He responded to one attack by Houston by claiming the members of the opposition were not all ‘cleanskins’:

Nobody can convince me that the Leader of the Opposition, or any other Opposition member, has never used his secretary, office, telephone or motor-car other than on parliamentary business. That is a lot of nonsense. I think it is fair that they should be used. I am not criticising that at all. What I am criticising is the attack by Opposition members on the use of the Government aircraft, trains, or any other facilities. They

¹ Described at the time by Percy Tucker as the first step towards setting up a ‘Banana State as a colony of Britain’ (*QPD* 1974:vol. 265, p. 31).

have to remember that they, in their turn, are in a similar position. They are not the cleanskins they make themselves out to be. (*QPD* 1973:vol. 263, p. 2117)

He failed to acknowledge that the scope available to the opposition to misuse any entitlements paled into insignificance compared with the resources at his disposal.

Labor moved an 'Alleged Lack of Confidence in Government' motion in March 1973 over the government's isolationist policy towards Canberra and the Premier's failure 'to meet and discuss with the new Prime Minister, Mr Whitlam, the hopes and desires of the people of this State' (*QPD* 1973:vol. 261, p. 2692). Labor's main argument was that Bjelke-Petersen was engaged in Canberra bashing to cover the disunity and bitterness among the government parties. Tucker accused the government of a 'dangerous deception' over 'its senseless confrontation with the Federal Labor administration' (*QPD* 1973:vol. 261, p. 3135). The Premier's defence was that Whitlam was adopting an 'anti-free enterprise foreign policy' and was shifting Australia into the orbit of Red China. He also believed there were 'very dangerous trends of the Commonwealth Government towards centralist control of power and towards exerting its influence over areas to the north of this State [the Torres Strait region] and also throughout the length and breadth of Queensland'. After a largely predictable debate that meandered from topic to topic (for example, mining, foreign affairs, Aboriginal affairs, the revaluation of the dollar, the price of T-bone steaks, police discontent and the crime rate, sick patients falling off hospital trolleys and even the Premier's psychological state of mind), the no-confidence motion was defeated with 34 votes for and 42 votes against. A number of ALP members continued the attack on the Premier, however, with Tom Burns describing his stance towards the Commonwealth as one of 'stubborn, conceived confrontation with Canberra' (*QPD* 1973:vol. 262, p. 258).

In opening the Parliament on 31 July 1973, the Governor, Sir Colin Hannah, gave the usual hyperbolic run-down of achievements and upcoming intentions. His speech was unremarkable except for one paragraph in which, on behalf of the Bjelke-Petersen government, he criticised the Whitlam government's coal export policy. The Governor said: 'Under normal conditions the mineral industry can be expected to continue its great expansion of recent years, but problems could be encountered because of the suggested changes in overseas marketing brought about by the attitudes of the Commonwealth Government' (*QPD* 1973:vol. 262, p. 2).

He was referring to the federal Labor government's plans to bring all mining exports under Commonwealth control and, in doing so, restrict Queensland exports, which had recently overtaken those of New South Wales. As the

Premier explained the next day: ‘we outlined some of our legislative programme and at the same time we voiced our concern about Commonwealth attitudes on issues which vitally affect the States’ (*Courier-Mail*, 2 August 1973).

Houston immediately declared the speech improper, saying the government had acted incorrectly by including party-political references in the opening speech. He regarded it as a partisan political attack on federal Labor. A few days later, in the Address-in-Reply debate, he refrained from criticising the Governor overtly (out of respect for the office), but instead attempted to defend the Commonwealth’s position in the House. Later in the reply debate, Keith Wright went further, claiming that the Governor had breached tradition when he referred to the problems that could be encountered because of the Commonwealth government. This, according to Wright, had undermined the ‘strength and the foundations of this high and honourable position’ (*QPD* 1973:vol. 262, p. 212). The government, he believed, followed tradition only when it suited it to do so. Houston also warned—after seeing reports in the press that Bjelke-Petersen favoured secession from Australia—that this would be impossible because Queensland would not be able to go it alone, citing the small population of the state (1.8 million), but also listing the numbers of sheep, cattle, grain production and even mining output as a way of demonstrating the state was not viable as a separate nation. Although the Premier subsequently denied in the Parliament that he had favoured secession, it was clear that he had made statements to reporters that he was considering such moves if he felt it was warranted.

Celebrating his fifth full year as Premier, Bjelke-Petersen became embroiled in yet another personal conflict-of-interest matter over the proposed location of the Tarong power station and his personal business interests. When asked a question by Gerry Jones about his involvement in a mining lease at Nanango (whether he was part lessee), Bjelke-Petersen replied carefully that he had ‘now no personal interest in that lease’. A week later, however, he made a ministerial statement to the Parliament clarifying his earlier statement, now claiming that the mining lease was held by Bjelke-Petersen Enterprises Proprietary Limited. He claimed he thought he had transferred his shares in mining leases to that company and that he was not a member of the company. The shareholders of Bjelke-Petersen Enterprises were his wife, his sister and his four children! He then admitted, however, that he might have misled the Parliament because his interest in the mining lease (a one-quarter stake) had, in fact, not been transferred to the new family trust company, as he had believed. He added, as though to invite scepticism:

It should be clear from the foregoing that I acted to the best of my knowledge and belief when, at the time of answering the question, I understood that I held no interest in any application for a mining lease...I

mention this to dispel any suggestion that I stand to obtain material benefit should a Cabinet decision be made to site the new powerhouse at Tarong. (*QPD* 1973:vol. 262, p. 75)

Cabinet did subsequently make a controversial decision to build a new powerhouse at Tarong. And, of course, the Premier continued to benefit from the leases as happened the next year when the stake of a now deceased partner with a half share was transferred to the Premier and the other business stakeholder.

One early example of Bjelke-Petersen's obsession with defeating Whitlam at every juncture was his hasty introduction of a bill to preserve the rights of Queensland appellants to appeal from the State Supreme Court directly to the Privy Council in the event Whitlam tried to abolish such an avenue. To ram the Appeals and Special Reference Bill through, the government suspended *Standing Orders*, putting the bill through all three readings in one day. Bjelke-Petersen's rationale was that the bill preserved the rights of the ordinary citizen to appeal to the Crown against the judiciary's rulings; it protected the traditional system of law as he understood it from change; it was also evidence he was prepared to stand up for state rights against possible encroachments of a central government. The Attorney-General, Bill Knox, argued that the Commonwealth was taking powers away from Queensland and that the state government had to take 'a protective stand'. He suggested that the state government was not defending 'forever appeals to the Privy Council' but that for the Commonwealth to take them away required constitutional change through a referendum. The opposition's position was that the preservation of the appeal to the Privy Council was a token of imperial deference and lack of independence. Houston said the move was a desperate attempt to retain a colonial system. After a four-and-a-half hour debate that was gagged 15 times, and was characterised mostly by yelling and name-calling, the bill was passed by 38 to 31 votes. Immediately this vote was taken, the entire opposition walked out of the Parliament, with Houston shouting 'You can have your Bill', before the bill was passed at the third reading with only government members present (*QPD* 1973:vol. 262, p. 74). On top of this, Bjelke-Petersen also announced his intention to maintain and increase the issuing of imperial honours in Queensland even if the Commonwealth decided against this course of action (but he did not mention he would later 'sell' such honours to rich supporters of his party).

The ombudsman that never was...but then was...

The Coalition had promised in the 1972 election campaign to appoint an ombudsman for the state with powers of investigation, even though the Premier had given a speech to the Parliament before the election in which he stated: 'The Government remains unconvinced that any ombudsman-type appointment in Queensland could effectively supplement or replace the very efficient liaison between the people and the Government presently provided by the 78 elected Members of this Parliament' (*QPD* 1971:vol. 257, pp. 1200–1, and recycled in *QPD* 1974:vol. 264, p. 3607).

During 1973, the opposition accused the government of ignoring this electoral commitment. Labor urged the government to press ahead and implement the scheme. It also believed that the appointment should not be at the whim of the Premier. The Premier informed the House that the government had not overlooked the issue but the matter remained 'under consideration' (*QPD* 1973:vol. 262, p. 241). In mid-1973, however, the government suddenly announced that the (now) 82 Members of Parliament would each receive a private secretary and an electoral office but these measures would come at the expense of the proposal to create an ombudsman. The Treasurer told members that the private secretary post was to assist electors in an electoral office, although some members wanted the secretary to assist with their parliamentary business. After some heated exchanges, it was agreed that the secretary would be located in the electorate unless other mitigating circumstances were taken into account. Later in the proceedings, Ed Casey (Ind., Mackay) even praised the Works Department for preparing his electoral office efficiently after the government's 'change of heart'.

Members were then informed that there would be no ombudsman established, as they would now be able to undertake such work with their enhanced resources. The government viewed the backbenchers collectively as a squadron of mini-ombudsmen. In question time and in interviews with the press, however, some Labor members highlighted the deficiencies in this argument. Members of Parliament, they appreciated, had few formal powers or rights of investigation open to them. They could not officially search files or interview officials.

Then, following this about-face, the government had another spectacular change of heart. It announced in March 1974 that it would now go ahead with the ombudsman initiative (but called it the 'Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations' to emphasise the position was to be responsible to the Parliament). This time, Bjelke-Petersen supported the bill wholeheartedly and, in introducing the bill at its first reading, claimed the legislation was 'a model of its kind' (*QPD* 1974:vol. 264, p. 3158). Labor supported the legislation,

but in the ensuing debate most of the contributions focused on the issue of who had proposed the idea first and who could take most credit for its appearance before the Parliament. It was a case of never stand between a popular idea and a politician seeking credit. Not long afterwards, in 1976, the government introduced an amendment bill to limit the retiring age of the commissioner. By then, the opposition had become somewhat critical of the office, considering that the act ‘lacks teeth’ (*QPD* 1976:vol. 270, p. 2743), while the ombudsman’s office had few staff and no women investigators. The then opposition leader, Tom Burns, said ‘the Premier cannot be forced to lay the [Ombudsman’s] report before the parliament. I suggest that we made a mistake when we called him “Parliamentary Commissioner”. Maybe we should have called him “Premier’s Commissioner”’ (*QPD* 1976:vol. 270, p. 2741).

In areas of administration, the system of public health was mounting as an explosive issue. The sector was dogged by shortages of doctors and nurses, shortages of funding and with hospitals being run-down. There were claims people were being left to die in hospitals, injured babies were being left unattended and wards were being closed in the Royal Brisbane Hospital. Labor alleged that ever since the Coalition had come to government it had allowed the public health system gradually to deteriorate. There were also repeated calls for a public inquiry to investigate the effectiveness of the public health system (*QPD* 1972:vol. 260, p. 1711). The Minister, Doug Tooth, who was by then seventy years old, came under constant criticism for his ineptness and inability to fix the problems in health. Later in the session, he indicated he was intending to resign from the Parliament at the next election.

With friends like these...

The Queensland Police Force continued to attract controversy on almost a daily basis. It was faced with increased crime rates, growing juvenile crime and various forms of public unrest from political protests to union street marches and student demonstrations. Other reforming policies directed at the police proved internally contentious and had bred antagonism—such as the attempt to recruit university graduates or the legislation to enable married women to become or remain police officers, which had not gone down well with the male-dominated hierarchy. On this last issue, the Police Minister, Max Hodges, did not proclaim the legislation providing women with enhanced employment opportunities for almost a year after it passed the Assembly. He was perhaps derelict in his duty, too lax or distracted or pressured by the police hierarchy.

A new Police Commissioner, Ray Whitrod, with an interest in reforming the police, had been appointed in 1970. He had come to Queensland from the

South Australian force and the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO)—an issue of some irritation to the parochial Queensland force—and had more recently served as Police Commissioner in Papua New Guinea. Indeed, the Police Minister had personally flown to Port Moresby to assist in the recruitment of Whitrod. Despite holding a master's degree from The Australian National University and being described by his minister as the 'most highly qualified Commissioner the Queensland Police Force has ever had', Whitrod had quickly lost the support of the Police Union. The Parliament was frequently told the 'academic' Whitrod was being undermined by senior police and by the powerful union. Whitrod also tended to speak out publicly about the problems he was encountering—such as when he called his officers 'a bunch of ning-nongs'. He also volunteered that criminals in Queensland were probably better educated than his police officers—principally to highlight the latter's lack of educational training. In the early days of Whitrod's tenure, however, both the Premier and the Police Minister were publicly forthcoming in his defence, with Bjelke-Petersen telling the Parliament in March 1973 that he was 'four-square behind the Police Force' and that 'we are very fortunate to have in Queensland the standard of Police Commissioner' we have. Others were less fulsome in their praise, with Bob Moore (Lib., Windsor) ungraciously labelling Whitrod as 'the head-hunter from New Guinea' (*QPD* 1973:vol. 261, p. 3421).

There were, however, regular and persistent calls from the opposition for Police Minister Hodges to resign. From 1968 to 1974 (with the exception of nine months during 1968–69), responsibility for police was included in the Works and Housing portfolio. Hodges, who had been Police Minister since 1969, was criticised for leaking confidential correspondence, for covering up alleged police brutality (especially against trade unionists) and for losing the confidence of the police rank and file (and especially the powerful Police Union). Press reports claimed that up to 99 per cent of police officers agreed that Hodges should resign—probably because he was associated with the Whitrod appointment and was a firm supporter of the latter's reforming ideas. Hodges would remain minister until he was moved by Bjelke-Petersen in August 1976 (to the portfolio of Tourism and Marine Services). Ministerial responsibility for the police would remain a vexed issue, with a total of eight National Party ministers holding the job between 1976 and 1989. Whitrod would face a torrid time while Commissioner, dealing with his political masters and with the internal politics of the police. In 1976, he resigned his commission early insisting that the level of political interference in the police was too great to withstand.

If Whitrod lacked friends in high places, his successor, Terry Lewis, did not. In one revealing assembly speech on rising youth crime, the former police officer, Don Lane, praised Detective Senior Sergeant Terry Lewis's work at the Juvenile Aid Bureau. Lane reported to the Parliament that Lewis had been promoted to

inspector and had recently ‘travelled the world under a Churchill Fellowship’ to study the problem of juvenile delinquency (*QPD* 1973:vol. 263, p. 1380). With such public recognition from government members, Lewis’s star was certainly on the rise.

Increasing claims of partiality against Speaker Lonergan

Bill Lonergan was never going to have an easy time as Speaker of the Assembly. His brusque manner and penchant for playing politics were inevitably going to land him in trouble. He was also considered to be falling under the Premier’s influence and doing his bidding, although the two had not got off to a good start (Bjelke-Petersen 1990:68). Throughout 1973 and 1974, the opposition constantly called his rulings into question, not merely through comments in the Chamber but also via the outside media. Most of these dissensions were because Lonergan would change his rulings to suit the government² and for not protecting opposition members from ‘imputations of improper motives and personal reflections’ such as when the Premier accused the Opposition Leader of being a coward and selling out Queensland. Keith Wright went further than most when he told the *Rockhampton Morning Bulletin* that ‘the rulings of the chair needed to be seriously investigated’, and continued:

It would seem the traditional independence of the speakership is being eroded because of the belligerent attitude of the Premier, who continually pressurises the Speaker into compromising situations... *Hansard* recorded the vitriolic attacks and personal abuse Government members had launched on the Opposition, yet these attacks were given the ‘blind eye’ by the Chair. (*QPD* 1973:vol. 263, p. 2054)

When Lonergan asked Wright to withdraw the remarks and apologise, Wright responded by saying that he stood by his earlier comments but agreed he would withdraw his comments ‘only in accordance with your request’. Lonergan considered this a conditional withdrawal and named him for his disrespect. While Gordon Chalk, as leader of the House, stood to move the exclusion, he offered Wright the chance again to unequivocally withdraw and apologise, before the motion was moved. This time, Wright replied: ‘Mr Speaker, I withdraw, and I apologise’—to which the Speaker commented: ‘Very well. The apology is accepted’ (*QPD* 1973:vol. 263, p. 2054).

² For example, closing down an Address-in-Reply debate in September 1973 (*QPD* 1973:vol. 262, p. 482).

Such incidents, however, merely magnified perceptions of the Speaker's bias. Lonergan at times allowed government members to explain any absence from the House but not opposition members. Jack Houston frequently challenged the Speaker's rulings on what was permissible in debate. Shortly before he was deposed as Opposition Leader, Houston challenged the right of the Speaker to refuse to accept matters of public importance being raised. When Lonergan prevented debate on the state of public health in Queensland, Houston moved a motion of dissent against his ruling from the chair. The motion incited some rowdy exchanges and multiple expressions of dissent from opposition spokespeople for more than an hour. In the slanging match, Houston stated:

Democracy in this House has reached a stage where we are debating whether your opinion was correct, and you are occupying the chair and determining whether I can speak on particular matters. Nowhere else in the world could this type of democracy be found, but it is covered by the Standing Orders. (*QPD* 1974:vol. 264, p. 3506)

Houston also alleged that Lonergan had tipped off the Health Minister that a matter of public importance about his portfolio was being proposed by the opposition and, that although the matter was not allowed, the 'clairvoyant' minister

on the same morning as the letter was written to you, Mr Speaker, he was able to look into the future, and, knowing that a letter was already in your hands, he rose in the House and delivered a vicious and vile attack on the honourable member for Mourilyan [Peter Moore, the shadow health minister]. There was no opportunity in the House to debate that. (*QPD* 1974:vol. 264, p. 3507)

Labor also felt that the Premier was giving instructions to Lonergan on what to rule. Labor members, however, were not the only sources of complaint. In September 1974, Russ Hinze was involved in a heated altercation with Lonergan over the Speaker ignoring his attempts to ask questions in question time. Hinze, who was a large man, said he was not 'going to jump up every time' he wanted to ask a question and keep being ignored. He said question time was antiquated and a waste of time, as he found it 'impossible to get your call when I want to ask questions in this House'. He then alleged that the Premier indicated to Lonergan who should be invited to ask questions, saying to the Speaker 'apparently you've got your favourites'. Lonergan named the Member for South Coast, and on Bjelke-Petersen's motion to suspend him, he was evicted from the Chamber (*QPD* 1974:vol. 265, p. 486). At the time, there was not much love lost between the Premier and Hinze, who became only the second government member suspended from the Parliament.

Loneragan resigned as Speaker and from his seat (Flinders) on 28 October 1974. Although he had not been the first choice of the government in 1972, he had shown himself to be a loyal political supporter of the government. The then independent Ed Casey, who later rejoined the ALP, said that many in the Labor Party had severe regrets about voting for Lonergan over Houghton.

Avoiding political oblivion: re-branding the Country Party's image

The Country Party State President, Bob Sparkes, and State Secretary, Mike Evans, had long advocated a name change for the Country Party—principally to broaden its appeal, especially in urban areas. Initially, the Country Party organisation flirted with the idea of merging with the DLP to appeal to conservative working-class voters and create a 'middle-of-the-road anti-socialist force'. This was a delicate move because many sections of the Country Party were fervently anti-Catholic. The Liberal Party, fearing that this was just another ruse to maintain the electoral dominance of the rural party over the urban party, strongly opposed the merger and indeed had earlier offered a merger between the Country and Liberal Parties, which was rejected by the Country Party. Liberal sitting members also often relied on DLP preferences to win their seats. Despite Evans holding a press conference announcing the merger, nothing much happened. Interestingly, the DLP claimed not to know much about what was going on. Over time, this merger proposal died, largely because the DLP regarded the Country Party's actions as a hostile takeover.

Then, in 1973, a confidential report produced by Sparkes argued that 'as surely as night follows day, if the Country party opts to remain an essentially rural-based party, it is doomed to political oblivion' (Lunn 1978:138). Re-branding the image rather than shotgun weddings was now the preferred strategy. With previous incarnations of the party having 'national' or 'nationalist' in their titles, and the example of the conservative National Party in New Zealand, the choice for a new name was obvious. Sparkes and Evans persuaded Bjelke-Petersen of the need to go National, but had less success with Country Party divisions at the federal level or in other states. Accordingly, in April 1974, the Country Party in Queensland became the 'National Party of Australia—Queensland', although this was sometimes shortened and advertised as the Queensland Nationals. It was claimed that the name change was 'not just a change of name' but instead 'provides a fresh and new opportunity to prove and demonstrate through political philosophies, policies and actions that the National Party of Australia is truly a national party working in the interests of the entire nation and its people'. The new party was supposedly 'alive with new expanded policies,

energetic fresh thinking, and a determination to protect the welfare and freedom of all Australians' (*Sunday Mail*, 7 April 1974). Press advertisements spoke of a new 20-page policy booklet and a recorded song marking the occasion, and a large party in a city hotel was hosted to mark the occasion (see the account of this in Lunn 1978:140–3). It was planned that speeches at the launch of the new party would be made under a portrait of the Queen, but when the state president was about to speak, it 'inauspiciously fell down as Sparkes rose to open the proceedings' (Lunn 1978:140).

The sordid conspiracies to discard Senator Gair

The Whitlam government's attempt to lure Senator Vince Gair out of the Senate to create an additional vacancy in the 1974 elections (that would presumably have advantaged Labor) involved at least three interrelated conspiracies. First, there was the scheming by Whitlam and Lionel Murphy to create an additional senate vacancy in 1974 by offering Gair the Ambassadorship to Ireland and the Holy See. Second, was the conspiracy to get Gair drunk in Canberra so that he did not formally tender his resignation to the President before the Queensland Government acted. Third, was the counter-conspiracy by Premier Bjelke-Petersen (knowing Gair was about to resign and create a vacancy) to force the Governor, Sir Colin Hannah, to issue the writs early for the five seats that were due so as not to include the Gair resignation—thereby avoiding the Queensland electors deciding who would fill the vacancy.

By 1974, Senator Gair was a forlorn figure in Canberra with his career going nowhere. He had been ousted from the leadership of the DLP the previous year and faced almost certain political defeat at the end of his senate term in 1977. Angry and full of resentment towards his DLP colleagues, Gair indicated to Whitlam that he would consider accepting a diplomatic posting. If Gair should resign before the 1974 half-senate election, this would mean that six senate spots would need to be filled, giving the Labor government an excellent opportunity to secure three of them (capturing back a DLP seat) and possibly gain control of the upper house. Labor stood the chance of winning 31 of the 60 seats in the upper house, giving the government the numbers in the Senate necessary to prevent the Coalition obstructing its legislative agenda. Whitlam seized on the opportunity, putting to one side his own antipathy to one of his most bitter political enemies, and began the process of appointing Gair as Australia's Ambassador to Ireland. Whitlam handled the arrangements personally and in the utmost secrecy. The press gallery got wind of the appointment, however, on 1 April after a leak to a reporter from the *Melbourne Sun*, and Whitlam's devious plan began to go awry.

On learning of Whitlam's somewhat unorthodox scheme to secure a third senate seat in Queensland, Bjelke-Petersen immediately bristled and set about attempting to abort the plan by any means at his disposal. The Premier remained unrelenting in his personal hatred of Whitlam and, with his departmental and legal advisers, hatched a remarkable counter-conspiracy to thwart the government's intentions. Time was of the essence. Bjelke-Petersen calculated that if Gair had not officially tendered his resignation to the Parliament then the Queensland government could legally issue the writs for the election before he did so, meaning that Gair's resignation would create a casual senate vacancy to be filled by the Queensland government until the next House of Representatives election. Bjelke-Petersen's plan involved two key tasks: first, to prevent Gair from officially tendering his resignation until the writs were issued, and second, to expedite the issuing of the writs. Both tasks had to be carried out in complete secrecy to maintain the element of surprise and prevent Whitlam from learning of his tactical counter-maneuvres. For the Premier's scheme to work, the writs had to be signed and issued the day before Senator Gair tendered his formal resignation.

Gair was by this time a very heavy drinker, so a strategy to keep him from resigning his senate seat before the writs were issued was not hard to conceive. Bjelke-Petersen contacted the Country Party's Senate Whip, Ron Maunsell (who was a long-time friend of Gair), and told him to keep Gair occupied. To do so, Maunsell invited Gair to a beer and prawn evening in his parliamentary office in Canberra. In what was to become known as 'the Night of the Long Prawns', Gair was plied with free beer and Queensland crustaceans until the early hours of the next morning. As Maunsell learnt during the course of the evening's festivities, Gair was still yet to officially tender his resignation and, as he had voted in a senate division during the evening, he could not be considered to have formally resigned from the Senate. Importantly, this enabled the Queensland government to show Gair was still an active senator after it had issued the writs for the half-senate election. Bjelke-Petersen's rum plan to stall Gair's resignation had worked to a tee (see Stevenson 2007).

While the beer and prawns did their work in Canberra, Bjelke-Petersen had been working furiously in his Brisbane office to have the writs for the next election signed. Throughout the afternoon, Bjelke-Petersen signed the various documents needed to have the writs issued, which were later rushed to Government House for signing by Governor Hannah, who must have been complicit in the conspiracy. The Governor's approval was conveyed to the government printer where the writs were announced by extraordinary *Government Gazette*. Having completed both tasks, Bjelke-Petersen had out-maneuvred the Prime Minister and stifled federal Labor's plan to pick up a third senate seat in Queensland at the forthcoming election. With hindsight, it is clear that one act of political

opportunism was countered by other acts of political cunning—to deny a senate majority. In Queensland, Bjelke-Petersen’s supporters felt that he had pulled off an astute political masterstroke.

Dumping the pilot and all aboard with a new opposition leader

Labor had endured a tumultuous time in opposition but its parliamentary leadership showed remarkable stability after 1958. Just two leaders had held the post in 16 years: Jack Duggan and Jack Houston. After years of dedicated if uninspiring service, Jack Houston was eventually ousted as opposition leader in July 1974, after seven years and nine months in the job. Houston had soldiered on, losing two elections in a row, and after Tom Burns had entered the Chamber, he was thought to be fast approaching his ‘last supper’. Towards the end of his time as leader, he had perhaps lost his enthusiasm and interest in the role. For instance, he went to New Zealand to judge a dog show in October 1972 when parliament was sitting, then in 1973 it was reported that he would be appointed to the Qantas board and would relinquish the leadership (but this did not occur, as Jack Egerton was appointed instead). In 1973, the influential newsletter *Inside Canberra* appeared, claiming Houston was going to be appointed as High Commissioner to New Zealand to make way for Burns to lead the party. Very much acting in character, however, the dour and determined Houston seemed to be intending to fight one more election campaign in 1974 or 1975, touring the state in readiness. Such was not to be. He was defeated six months out from the state election in a coup orchestrated by his deputy, Percy Tucker, along with the help of Kev Hooper and Fred Newton, who combined the numbers to depose him.

Houston’s demise followed an almost Machiavellian script of deceit to the letter. First, in March 1974, the parliamentary Labor Caucus unanimously carried a vote of confidence in his leadership (moved duplicitously by Tucker). Then, in June, it was reported from Labor sources that Houston was unlikely to face a challenge and would have a third attempt at becoming premier in 1975. One month later came the swift execution. At a hastily convened Caucus meeting, Tucker organised a vote of no confidence in Houston after the state executive of the ALP had asked him to resign voluntarily (which he refused to do) over the poor showing of Labor at the May federal election. As Houston later admitted, he was ‘not a numbers man and didn’t do any lobbying’ (*Courier-Mail*, 2 July 1974). At the Caucus meeting, Houston lost by 17 votes to 15; then Tucker

was elected by the same vote. Fred Newton beat Burns for the deputy leader's position by 23 to nine. It was a slap in the face for Burns (who at the time was labelled a 'new leftie!').

When Houston was deposed as leader, he continued to sit in the Parliament for another six years until his retirement in 1980.³ Houston was widely regarded (even by government members) as a 'nice bloke' and a 'nice chap', but also as someone who was not aggressive enough or sufficiently cunning to win the premiership.

With Tucker at the helm, Labor now had a new leader to sell and not long to sell him. He had developed a reputation as an aggressive parliamentary performer and 'fiery debater' but was relatively unknown to the wider public. He was fifty-four years of age, had a craggy almost funereal face and wore his Brylcreemed hair in a slicked-back style—and unfortunately had a quick temper and questionable judgment.

Labor's failed gambit: 'Go out on the hustings, Joh, and I'll slaughter you'

As early as August 1973 and throughout much of 1974, there was a crescendo of press speculation about the government going to the polls early. Journalists were fed titbits of information from the government concerning its intentions of capitalising on its standing in the polls and renewing its mandate. Journalist Hugh Lunn in *The Australian* (6 September 1974, p. 9) claimed an early election was likely to 'beat an expected large increase in inflation and unemployment early next year'. He reported that Gordon Chalk was supposedly behind the early poll push, designed 'to cash in on the present unpopularity of the Federal ALP in Queensland'. Cabinet was, however, far from unanimous in support of the proposal. In early October, the National Party's 33-man Management Committee voted overwhelming against an early poll, but resolved to leave the final decision to Bjelke-Petersen. Unlike Chalk (who also felt a large pro-government swing would advantage the Liberals in seat gains over the Nationals), Bjelke-Petersen was more circumspect. Press reports talked of a row occurring about the poll date, with the Premier ruling out an early poll. On a number of occasions, he stated definitively that there would be no early election. There were also rumours many ministers were tiring of the responsibilities of office and wanted to call it a day.⁴

³ Beginning a tradition of former Labor leaders remaining in the Chamber, followed by Burns, Casey, Wright (but only for three months), Warburton and eventually Goss.

⁴ Labor had been calling the ministry 'the reluctant government'. According to Hugh Lunn, 'so many of the State's ageing Cabinet have been angling for political sinecures that the Opposition is fast labelling it the

The government could not believe its luck, however, when, in an otherwise unremarkable supply debate, the hapless Percy Tucker challenged Bjelke-Petersen to go to an early election ostensibly on the issue of rising unemployment. His goading of the Premier came about on 8 October 1974 when Tucker was speculating on the leadership rivalry between Chalk and the Premier. According to Tucker, the government was afraid to go to the people and Bjelke-Petersen was prevaricating because he wanted Chalk to announce his retirement from politics (which he had indicated he would do if the government went to the polls in May 1975). Tucker believed Bjelke-Petersen wanted the Treasury portfolio himself, so had put out the line that ‘he had decided against an early election because in the present circumstances an early election would be irresponsible’. When Bob Moore (Lib., Windsor) interjected with the taunt ‘You’re frightened of an election’, Tucker then committed an act of impetuous naivety from which there would be no return. He responded to the interjection with:

I am not concerned. If the Government wishes to hold it tomorrow, it is all right with the Opposition. Let us fight it on the issue on which I am now speaking. My challenge to the Government is both responsible and serious. There is no doubt that, electorally, my party will win more seats at an election next May than at an election next month—I realise that—but the ALP will win whether the Government brings it on now or next May...If an election is needed to create jobs in this State, then let us have an election—and let us have it right now! Whatever it takes, this State must go back to work. (*QPD* 1974:vol. 266, pp. 1115–16)

He had thrown down the gauntlet. Media commentary was astounded that the Opposition Leader would make such an explicit challenge. An editorial in the *Courier-Mail* (10 October 1974) described Tucker’s challenge as poor judgment, saying: ‘It is amazing that the State Opposition Leader...has challenged the Government to an election on unemployment.’

A few days later the press announced the ‘Premier rejects Tucker poll tip’ (*Courier-Mail*, 14 October 1974). The paper reported that Tucker was expecting an election announcement the next day or in the next few days, claiming Bjelke-Petersen had capitulated to Chalk’s wishes for an early election (not all Liberals were keen on an early poll: Bill Knox was opposed, as was Colin Lamont from the Young Liberals, a preselected candidate for 1974). From his Kingaroy property, the Premier was quoted as saying he had no intention of naming a date for the election any time soon. On 22 October, however, the Coalition held a two-hour

“reluctant Government”. So many of the 14-man cabinet wanted to get the cocktail circuit job of Queensland Agent-General in London, that Cabinet last month had to have a secret ballot to decide which minister would get the post’ (*The Australian*, 6 September 1974). Four ministers had expressed interest but the Minister for Lands and Forestry, Wally Rae, won the ballot, and when he next appeared in the Chamber he was greeted with opposition catcalls of ‘Arise, Sir Wall!’ from Kev Hooper (*QPD* 1974:vol. 265, p. 697).

emergency meeting called by the Premier to discuss the election. Clearly the temptation was too good to ignore. So, after almost daily speculation that the poll was about to be called, the Premier finally announced, on 23 October, that the election would be held on 7 December and that he was tipping a ‘smashing win’. It was a calculated decision to bring forward the election by five months, made some 14 days after Tucker’s blunder. Chalk told reporters, however, that he had not been informed by the Premier of the final decision and had ‘heard this morning from a member of the news media that November 4 was going to be the date for launching’ the government’s campaign (*Courier-Mail*, 25 October 1974). Already in the Parliament, the Member for Callide, Lindsay Hartwig, had volunteered that if he were premier he would accept the Opposition Leader’s challenge to hold an early election, predicting that, because so many in the community had changed their minds in recent months, ‘in an early election half the Opposition members would disappear from this Chamber’ and adding that many will be ‘missing in the new Parliament’ (*QPD* 1974:vol. 266, p. 1352).

The Parliament continued to sit for another seven days after the Premier had announced an election would be called. On 23 October, a famous incident arose when Bjelke-Petersen moved to suspend *Standing Orders* to prevent a matter of public interest being moved by the opposition. The Premier had just finished an emotive ‘broadside’ spray against ‘Labor’s socialist policies’ and against ‘the ever-increasing threat of restrictive socialist domination’. The election, he maintained, had to be called so ‘we will consolidate the forces against socialism in this State and throughout the nation’ (*QPD* 1974:vol. 266, pp. 1533–4). Tucker protested vehemently over the attempt to prevent him from speaking and launched an attack on the government. He kept insisting ‘I want to be able to be heard’, ‘I have the right to be heard’, adding to the Premier: ‘You haven’t got any guts. You made your own statement and you won’t let me speak. You are a gutless Premier.’ He then added ‘democracy is dead in this Chamber’. He was so incensed he refused to leave the Chamber when he was asked to withdraw by the Speaker. When Bjelke-Petersen moved to suspend him, he let fly: ‘you brought this on by your filthy tactics...You haven’t the guts to take the medicine I was about to give you.’ He also claimed ‘I would have given him a bucket today’. When the Premier’s motion to suspend Tucker was passed 39 to 28 votes, Tucker blurted out: ‘Go out on the hustings, Joh, and I’ll slaughter you!’ Tucker’s bravado has subsequently passed into political folklore as one of the most foolhardy statements in Australian politics. Within a week, the fortieth Parliament was dissolved and an election called.

A spectacular landslide for Joh and a wipe-out for Labor

A total of 255 candidates contested the 1974 election (some 24 less than in 1972). Beginning Labor's election campaign in mid-November, Tucker came out fighting, saying he wanted to win 'like mad', adding 'I'll go like hell to win, I hate defeat' (*Courier-Mail*, 16 November 1974). He also stated that 'if the Premier plays it rough, I'll be prepared to box on with him' (*Courier-Mail*, 24 October 1974). Although starting late, his election campaign was described as the 'most extensive Queensland election campaign by a State Labor leader'. The ALP chartered a plane—similar to the one used by Bjelke-Petersen, except that the ALP plane had the campaign slogan 'LET'S GO' emblazoned on its side. Tucker, who held one of Labor's most marginal seats in Queensland (he had won Townsville West by a few hundred votes in 1972), had problems in his own backyard. His chances of retaining his seat were reduced when he was challenged by two Country Party candidates, Alderman Max Hooper (the Townsville Mayor) and B. Newell (a local businessman), one Liberal candidate, K. Rundle, and Dr K. Dorney from the DLP. The Country Party's 'how-to-vote' card gave its supporters a split ticket with one version endorsing Hooper and the other Newell, but both promoted a tight exchange of preferences. Elsewhere, Col Bennett, the former Labor frontbencher who had been dis-endorsed in 1972 (and lost his seat), announced his intention to run for the seat of Kurilpa as a National Party candidate!

In an unusual move, Russ Hinze, the outspoken member for South Coast, was appointed to the ministry the day after the election date was announced. He replaced Henry McKechnie, who had become too ill to remain Minister for Local Government and Electricity. Although not one of Joh's favourites (and feeling himself overlooked), Hinze was effectively made minister on the eve of the caretaker period (the writs had not yet been issued and, as mentioned, the Parliament sat for another week). His appointment signalled he was likely to be retained within the ministry after the election was over. He told journalists at the time that his appointment would 'curb his tongue' and improve his parliamentary behaviour. He had recently been suspended for provoking the Speaker, when he reputedly spent the rest of the day drinking in the bar before chasing a young woman (not a staff member) round Parliament House in his underwear!

The Liberals' campaign stressed its economic management credentials, especially with the threat of unemployment rising in the future. They favoured going early to capitalise on their own popularity and the anti-Labor sentiment in the electorate. Chalk gave much prominence to the leadership contest between himself and Bjelke-Petersen and declared his intention to be premier after the

election. He stated: ‘whether Mr Bjelke-Petersen or I am elected Premier, the principal thing is that we must take certain action now so that we are leading the government when the crisis arrives’ (*Courier-Mail*, 23 September 1974). He also gave his opinion that if the Liberals dominated the Coalition after the election, ‘[m]y colleague Mr Bjelke-Petersen will accept the position’ (*Sunday Sun*, 27 October 1974). The *Courier-Mail* (28 October 1974) kicked the story along the next day with the headline ‘Premier Chalk? No chance—Joh’, quoting the incumbent as saying ‘I’m Premier now and I’m going to be Premier after the election’.

The Nationals’ campaign again stressed the government’s record of state development, warning that further economic prosperity was, in the Premier’s own words, jeopardised by ‘the alien and stagnating, centralist, socialist, communist-inspired policies of the federal Labor government’ (*The Australian*, 24 October 1974; see also *AJPH* 1975:vol. 21, no. 1, p. 74). The Premier conducted this crusade against socialism and communism by casting ‘himself in the role of leader and saviour of Queensland’ (*The Australian*, 24 October 1974; *AJPH* 1975:vol. 21, no. 1, p. 74). The Premier also briefed journalists that his next government would likely contain an additional two ministers, possibly looking after energy, the environment or urban and regional planning.

The electoral result was a landslide to the Coalition. The National Party won 39 seats (a net gain of 13, up from 26); the Liberals won 30 seats (up nine from its previous total of 21); and two independents were returned (Aikens and Casey). The Coalition now held 84.2 per cent of the seats in the Assembly. In the new Parliament, seats rather than total votes counted for everything and on election night at the tally room, Chalk finally realised that he would never become premier in his own right. The primary vote for the Nationals was 27.88 per cent—a swing towards it of almost 8 per cent. The Liberals managed a higher vote, with 31.09 per cent—an increase of 9 per cent. Bjelke-Petersen polled a massive 83.4 per cent of the primary vote in his seat of Barambah against his ill-fated Labor challenger.

In the new Parliament, 17 new Nationals would take their seats for the first time, many of whom would become major actors in the next 15 years. They included: Ivan Gibbs (Albert), Martin Tenni (Barron River), Vince Lester (Belyando), Eric Deeral (Cook), Tony Elliott (Cunningham), Gordon Simpson (Cooroora), Bill Glasson (Gregory), Bob Katter (Kennedy), Lionel (Lin) Powell (Isis), Albert Hales (Ipswich West), Angelo Bertoni (Mount Isa), Victoria Kippin (Mourilyan), John Goleby (Redlands), John Warner (Toowoomba South), Max Hooper (Townsville West), Neil Turner (Warrego) and Bill Lamond (Wynnum). Significantly, Eric Deeral, who narrowly won Cook by 344 votes (3459 to 3115), was the first and, thus far, only Aboriginal member of the Queensland Parliament. He would hold his seat for just one term (1974–77).

A further 10 new Liberals joined the Parliament—namely: John Greenwood (Ashgrove), Dennis Young (Barooka), David Byrne (Belmont), Harold Lowes (Brisbane), Brian Lindsay (Everton), Rob Akers (Pine Rivers), Rosemary Kyburz (Salisbury), Colin Lamont (South Brisbane), Terry Gygar (Stafford) and John Lockwood (Toowoomba North). Unsurprisingly, many of these new members would be ‘oncers’—five Liberals (Byrne, Lamont, Lindsay, Lowes and Young) and three Nationals (Deeral, Hales and Lamond).

In contrast, Labor slumped to just 36.03 per cent—its lowest primary result since 1909, excluding the debacle of the 1957 split. It had suffered a 10 per cent swing against it. In the House, Labor managed to hold just 11 seats, and was reduced to the so-called ‘cricket team’. It was not the outcome Tucker had in mind when he adopted the slogan ‘LET’S GO’. To add to the ignominy, Tucker lost his seat to Max Hooper (NP) and his deputy, Fred Newton, also lost his seat, to David Byrne (Lib.). Some years later, Geoff Smith (ALP, Townsville West) recalled Tucker’s defeat:

In the 1974 election, Mr Tucker was opposed by a representative from the Liberal Party, two National Party candidates, one of whom was Mr Max Hooper, and Dr Dorney from the DLP. It will probably surprise many newer members of the Parliament that in that election Mr Hooper polled only 1652 primary votes from the total of 12 428 valid votes cast. That 1600 votes represented, as a primary vote, only 13 per cent and may well be a record for the minimum percentage of votes cast to have a member elected to a seat in this house. Nevertheless, Mr Hooper, after attracting the second preference votes of the DLP and subsequently the second preference votes of his co-candidate Mr Newell, was able to pull slightly in front of the Liberal Party candidate and attract his second preference votes to finish up with a total vote of a few hundred over Mr Tucker. That was how, for the first time and after 15 years, the seat was lost by the Australian Labor Party and became for a short period a Government seat. (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 220)

Eventually, Hooper beat Tucker by 886 votes (6657 to 5771). In total, Labor had lost 22 seats. Those ALP sitting members who had contested their seats in 1974 but who were swept out included: Jack Aiken, Ted Baldwin, Jim Blake, Ray Bousen, Fred Bromley, Bill D’Arcy, Brian Davis, Ted Harris, Roy Harvey, Gerry Jones, Violet Jordan, Ken Leese, Peter Moore, Fred Newton, Percy Tucker, Bill Wood and Peter Wood. Labor lost other seats it had held where sitting members had chosen not to re-stand (for example, Doug Sherrington, Pat Hanlon, Alex Inch, Hughie O’Donnell and Edwin Wallis-Smith).

Labor’s surviving ‘cricket team’ consisted of Tom Burns, Harold Dean, Martin Hanson, Kev Hooper, Jack Houston, Gene (Lou) Jensen, Ray Jones, Jack Melloy,

Evan Marginson, Keith Wright and Les Yewdale. After its tiny Caucus met in early 1975, they nominated Tom Burns as Opposition Leader, with Jack Melloy as his deputy, Evan Marginson as whip and Kev Hooper as secretary. They had few options open to them and no stomach for a tussle over the posts after such a mauling.

Vi Jordan had lost her seat after eight and a half years, but two new women entered the Parliament: Vicky Kippin and Rosemary Kyburz—the former was only the second Country–National woman to sit in the Chamber while Kyburz was the first Liberal woman ever to do so. Kyburz would marry another member (Rob Akers) and become the first woman to fall pregnant and have a child while sitting as a member. Kippin would serve for two terms, while Kyburz and her husband would both survive three terms in marginal seats. Into the realm of Trivial Pursuit, there were now three Hoopers in the Parliament: one for every party. Keith Hooper was a Liberal minister, Max Hooper had just won Townsville West for the Nationals, while Kev Hooper carried the flag for the Labor Party.

Bjelke-Petersen's fourth ministry

The original ministry operating from 23 December remained at 14, but after the passing of the *Officials in Parliament Act 1975* in March the ministry was expanded by four to 18. Four ministers had left the Parliament at the previous election (Alan Fletcher, Henry McKechnie, Doug Tooth and Wally Rae, who had become Agent-General).⁵ They were immediately replaced by Russ Hinze (who had joined the ministry, replacing Rae just before the election), Tom Newbury, Ken Tomkins and Llew Edwards. Three months later, however, the additional four ministers were sworn in: Val Bird and Claude Wharton from the Nationals, and Norman Lee and Bill Lickiss from the Liberals. The final ministerial line-up was complete. It consisted of

- Premier: Johannes Bjelke-Petersen, NP
- Deputy Premier and Treasurer: Gordon Chalk, Lib.
- Minister for Mines and Energy: Ronald Camm, NP
- Minister for Justice and Attorney-General: William Knox, Lib.
- Minister for Community, Welfare Services and Sport: John Herbert, Lib.
- Minister for Industrial Development, Labour Relations and Consumer Affairs: Fred Campbell, Lib.

⁵ It was alleged later in the Parliament by Kevin Hooper that when Wally Rae was appointed Agent-General he 'took a lot of [parliament] furniture with him' (*QPD* 1980:vol. 282, p. 51). Rae was also involved in an international 'witch-hunt' to obtain information in Switzerland on the notorious 'Loans Affair', which had already brought down the Whitlam government.

- Minister for Primary Industries: Vic Sullivan, NP
- Minister for Police and Leader of the House: Max Hodges, NP
- Minister for Water Resources: Neville Hewitt, NP
- Minister for Transport: Keith Hooper, Lib.
- Minister for Local Government and Main Roads: Russ Hinze, NP
- Minister for Tourism and Marine Services: Tom Newbery, NP
- Minister for Lands, Forestry, National Parks and Wildlife: Ken Tomkins, NP
- Minister for Health: Dr Llew Edwards, Lib.
- Minister for Education and Cultural Activities: Val Bird, NP
- Minister for Works and Housing: Norman Lee, Lib.
- Minister for Aboriginal and Islanders Advancement and Fisheries: Claude Wharton, NP
- Minister for Survey, Valuation, Urban and Regional Affairs: Bill Lickiss, Lib.

The Nationals enjoyed 10 cabinet posts to the Liberals' eight. A new portfolio of Deputy Premier was formerly established for Chalk and coupled with the Treasury portfolio. Ron Camm and Bill Knox were deputy leaders in their respective parties. The forty-first Parliament first met on 25 February 1975; it was to be a momentous year.

Bjelke-Petersen's pre-emptive strike and the demise of Whitlam

In mid-1975, Bjelke-Petersen was infamously involved in a second major political controversy concerning the replacement of a senator from Queensland. In June 1975, one of Labor's Queensland senators, Bert Milliner, died suddenly, requiring a senate vacancy to be filled by the State Parliament. Under longstanding parliamentary practice, it was conventional that when a senator's seat became vacant before the expiration of their term of service, a replacement would be chosen from the same political party by the relevant state parliament. Reflecting the deep animosity of the times, this convention was twice deliberately broken in 1975. The first breach occurred when Senator Lionel Murphy from New South Wales resigned from the Senate to take up a position on the High Court, after which the Liberal NSW Premier, Tom Lewis, broke with convention and appointed an independent senator in Murphy's place (the Albury Mayor, Cleaver Bunton). In Queensland, after Milliner's death, the Labor Party announced that Dr Mal Colston, a teacher, would take up the vacancy in the Senate. Not one to abide by bipartisan convention when political advantage was a stake, Bjelke-Petersen was determined to frustrate and weaken the Whitlam government

at every possible opportunity. He initially insisted that he would not accept Labor's sole nomination (it was not clear on what authority other than he believed he could control the numbers in the Assembly, and that Labor had earlier asked for a similar choice over Senator Bonner's appointment). Instead, he demanded that the Labor Party put up a list of three candidates from which the State Parliament would decide. The Premier communicated this demand to the Opposition Leader on 17 July. He probably chose to do this to create mischief among the Labor factions and personalities, indicating to them who 'called the tune' and insisting that he would decide which Labor person went to Canberra not the opposition (or he calculated all along that Labor would not produce three names, so he would have a less encumbered choice; see Lunn 1984:216). Labor refused to pander to Bjelke-Petersen's demand, so initially when the Parliament debated the issue (on 27 August) the government refused to allow it to appoint a senator to fill the vacancy brought about by Milliner's death; it defeated Labor's motion by 15 in favour to 63 against. Only three Liberals voted with Labor—Bill Kaus, Bill Hewitt and Colin Lamont—as did the independent Ed Casey. Voting to break the convention were all the Nationals and the remaining Liberals, including: Mike Ahern, Rob Akers, Joh Bjelke-Petersen, David Byrne, Gordon Chalk, Geoff Chinchin, Llew Edwards, John Greenwood, Terry Gygar, John Herbert, Russ Hinze, Bill Knox, Rosemary Kyburz, Norman Lee, Bill Lickiss, Colin Miller, Bob Moore, Charles Porter, Norman Scott-Young and Bruce Small, as well as the Speaker, Jim Houghton, and the independent Tom Aikens (NQP). Interestingly, many of the small-l Liberals who put themselves forward as reformers were nevertheless prepared to use the Parliament for partisan advantage.

The second vote occurred in the Parliament on 3 September 1975. Behind the scenes, the Premier and his closest advisers (including Allen Callaghan) had been looking for any disgruntled Labor-oriented identities who opposed Whitlam but who might agree to have their names put forward. It was rumoured that they had found up to four—among them were Pat Field, a sixty-four-year-old French polisher who was the President of the Federated Furnishing Trades Union and a card-carrying member of the Labor Party, and Ted Harris, the former ALP Member for Wynnum (1966–74) who had allowed his membership to lapse. The Premier apparently had in his possession Field's ALP membership card (no. 830), which had been renewed on 26 March 1975, so took the opportunity to nominate Field against Colston. Bjelke-Petersen also knew that Field was a religious conservative who was hostile to the Whitlam government and prepared to help the Coalition's obstructionist strategy in the Senate. He knew that Field had long aspired to hold a seat in the Parliament and calculated that despite being a previous member of the party (he was immediately expelled for agreeing to stand), he would assist the federal Coalition bring down the Whitlam government and force an early election.

In the second debate, the government split but managed to elect Field to the Senate. The Premier's insistence to install Field caused considerable dissent within the ranks of the Liberal Party, as many strongly believed that the conventions governing political conduct should be upheld over the interests of short-term political gain. The Deputy Premier, Sir Gordon Chalk, spoke out against Bjelke-Petersen's nomination of the Labor renegade, but said the decision for each member was a conscience vote. The Minister for Industrial Development, Fred Campbell, also spoke out against the move, as did two Liberal backbenchers (Colin Lamont and Rosemary Kyburz). In the process, three Liberals—John Greenwood, Colin Miller and Norman Scott-Young—spoke in support of the Premier's nomination. At the conclusion of the debate, the vote for Tom Burns' nomination of Mal Colston was lost 26 in favour to 53 against. The vote for Field was carried by 50 votes to 26. In total, 14 Liberals sided with Labor to oppose Field, including five ministers—Chalk, Campbell, Edwards, Hooper and Lee—and nine backbenchers: Akers, Gygar, Hewitt, Kaus, Kyburz, Lamont, Lindsay, Lockwood and Dennis Young. Interestingly, four Liberals (Byrne, Herbert, Knox and Lickiss) abstained. A number of National Party members also wanted to vote against Field's nomination, but were deterred with the threat of losing party endorsement.

On securing the Senate vacancy, Pat Field immediately left no doubt about his political crusade, stating publicly that 'Mr Whitlam will never get a vote from me' (Kelly 1976:253). Crucially, the loss of a Labor senator (Milliner) and the appointment of Field gave the federal opposition the numbers needed to block the government's budget legislation, which would lead to the dismissal of Whitlam. The dismissal of Labor federally led to an incident of terrorism against the Queensland Premier, when a clumsily made letter bomb was sent to the Premier on 19 November, injuring two staff members.

Field was sworn in as a senator on 9 September 1975, amid a mass walkout by the Labor senators. He cut a forlorn figure in Canberra and apparently walked into the swing doors of the Senate chamber. Simultaneously, the Labor government questioned his eligibility to sit, claiming that he was still a member of the Queensland Public Service at the time of his nomination and, therefore, ineligible to hold public office. After being issued with a High Court writ challenging his right to hold a senate seat, he was granted a month's leave of absence from the Commonwealth Parliament. Although he was still entitled to vote, his absence meant little to the balance of power in the Senate as the opposition still held a majority of one over Labor. Yet, the Coalition parties again broke with parliamentary convention and refused to 'pair' a senator (abstain from voting) to maintain the relative positions of the government and opposition. The Whitlam government had been critically weakened in the upper house. With the opposition determined to bring down the government through withholding

supply, there was nothing Whitlam could do to prevent the opposition using its numbers in the Senate to paralyse the government. While Senator Field served for only 90 days as a senator, asked one question and had largely brought ridicule on himself through his evident lack of knowledge of political matters or basic parliamentary procedures, his time in the Senate had served its purpose.

After Whitlam had gone, Bjelke-Petersen continued to run his own vendetta against former Labor ministers. He commissioned a secret financial investigation into the origins of the funds behind the Loans Affair, at one point dispatching a US financial adviser, Wiley Fancher, to Switzerland to investigate the paper trail. There was much speculation back in Queensland about how much these further investigations were costing, with press reports suggesting the Premier had spent \$250 000, while he tried to downplay the amount, claiming it was more like \$10 500. Queensland's Agent-General in London, Wally Rae, was also sent to assist the cause. Labor described this as a 'sordid spy drama' and a 'putrid exercise by a man who has become possessed by his own hatreds and bigotries' (*QPD* 1976:vol. 270, p. 3030).

After the demise of the Whitlam government, the local business community held a celebration 'Thank you Joh' dinner at the Lennon's Plaza Hotel in April 1976. The dinner was sold out, with 550 admirers attending at \$18 a head and a further 160 on the waiting list who had paid so needed to be reimbursed when they missed out. The Liberals largely boycotted the dinner as they felt the testimonial should have been a joint one involving Chalk as well.

Conclusion

By the end of 1975, Bjelke-Petersen had made the National Party's position in government unassailable. In the process he had decimated the parliamentary opposition to the point where they were almost non-viable as an alternative government. He had also become the doyen of the conservative forces throughout Australia, an acknowledged strategist and leader of the 'anti-Canberra right' among state premiers. He had gained widespread notoriety as a tough politician who could fight boots and all, for his determination to win political fights and for his unorthodox ways of doing business. As one Labor frontbencher candidly admitted: 'if ever I saw a person changed by the need to survive, it is the Premier' (Doug Sherrington, in *QPD* 1974:vol. 265, p. 304). The Premier was also not one to draw fine distinctions between his personal and political interests or between his private business interests and public responsibilities.

Bjelke-Petersen was also beginning to command the Parliament. He had shaken off his nervous start, when the opposition was calling him '19 per cent Joh', referring to his party's vote at the 1972 election. He was, unlike Nicklin,

depriving the opposition of oxygen. He was closing down debates, using the gag to push legislation through or bring forward votes. He was suspending *Standing Orders* when the opposition was attempting to move matters of public importance. And when he got wind that the opposition was planning to censure him, he would prevent them and bring on his own motions without notice—as he did in 1973 to advocate a ‘no vote’ in the national ‘prices and incomes’ referenda, which was not at all a state matter but one the Premier felt passionate about defeating. He kept repeating the tactic of firing off an unannounced ministerial statement but then denying the opposition from launching its own debate on a matter of public concern—as he did against Percy Tucker at the outset of the 1974 election. More tellingly, he was calling the opposition disloyal and ‘traitors to Queensland’.

During this period, Bjelke-Petersen never really did comprehend how an effective legislature ought to operate—with inclusion, with resources and with some legitimacy attached to the opposition as the scrutineers of government (if not quite the alternative government in waiting). When commenting on the \$1.2 million budget for the Legislative Assembly, the Premier spoke about the ‘marked improvements in the conditions under which Parliament functions’ but indicated exactly what he meant in his next sentence when he said: ‘the air-conditioning of the Chamber has resulted in greater physical comfort for all concerned’ (*QPD* 1973:vol. 263, p. 2074). Although the government eventually granted MPs greater assistance, which was long overdue, it came initially at the cost of jettisoning the proposal to establish a state ombudsman, which was later rectified in 1974. Bjelke-Petersen began to issue proposed bills to the media before he presented them to the opposition and on some occasions even started debates before the opposition had seen the written bill. Labor was convinced the Premier just did not get it. And even when, after some sustained pressure from his own side to establish parliamentary committees, Bjelke-Petersen eventually agreed to allow a committee to investigate violent crimes, it was permitted to include only government members, not members of the opposition. As the dissident Liberal John Murray said in December 1973:

I say unequivocally and very sincerely that I believe that no Parliament in the Australasian area is as inadequately served in basic, fundamental services vital to efficient functioning and preservation as the Queensland Parliament. I also believe that no other Parliament sets out so deliberately to prevent Her Majesty’s Opposition from carrying out its time-honoured constitutional role. Further, I believe that no other Parliament attempts to operate with such a wide gulf between Cabinet and private members, and that no Cabinet acts in such a tight, corporate preserve, with such a well-drilled technique of ‘divide and conquer’ in dealing with Government members. As well, I doubt whether there has

ever before been a Government that has promised to do so much by way of parliamentary reform and has done so little. (*QPD* 1973:vol. 263, p. 2553)

Before he quit his job as Opposition Leader, Jack Houston was more succinct. He simply said: 'Honourable members opposite talk about the operation of democracy. They make a mockery of democracy' (*QPD* 1973:vol. 263, p. 2107).