

13. The doldrums in opposition, 1968–1989

By 1968, after 10 years in opposition, Labor was finally getting its act together, presenting itself as a viable alternative to the government. While Labor had regrouped and seen off the rival QLP–DLP challenge, the Coalition government had entered a period of instability. In 1968, Frank Nicklin, the ‘Gentleman Premier’, had finally retired and his successor, Jack Pizzey, died suddenly after only six months in office. The new Premier, Joh Bjelke-Petersen, had difficulties convincing his colleagues that he had the wherewithal to lead the government and be electorally competitive. Labor had replaced the veteran Jack Duggan with Jack Houston, who was finally making some impression with voters. Labor’s vote had been increasing but was no threat to the conservative Coalition’s hegemony.

Yet Labor was afflicted with bouts of internecine conflict and found it difficult to present a unified image to the electorate. It appeared that the parliamentary party (and its union wing) was perpetually feuding and driven largely by enmity, unfit to govern and incapable of denting the Coalition’s popularity. Over successive elections, Labor looked divided, presented dull and predictable campaigns and had bland leaders who spent their time looking over their shoulders. As one contemporary commentator noted: ‘The Labor Party, with wondrous inventiveness, manage[d] to find new ways to stab itself in the back’ (*The Age*, 29 November 1980). Labor’s three decades in opposition were not due entirely to the government’s constraints or the gerrymander; Labor would have to share some of the blame for its internal disarray and factional brawling.

Life in opposition was a difficult, morale-sapping time for Labor members and supporters. There were few high points to celebrate. As the years in opposition went by, Labor became disheartened and many veterans believed they would never gain government, so there was little point in putting in the hard yards to address the state of the party. Labor politicians appeared to have internalised a ‘work to rule’ policy (putting in the minimum public service hours) and there was little incentive to be innovative or entrepreneurial.¹ When the Parliament was not in session, Labor parliamentarians were likely to be spotted on their local bowling green or fishing, rather than actively working their electorates.

¹ This view is supported by Wayne Goss’s admission that in the 1970s many in the Labor Party thought ‘simply being in Parliament in Opposition was a pretty good job. You have a press conference now and again, or more likely just issue a press release, and then you go to lunch’ (see S. Rodgers, ‘Time exposure puts Goss in the fourth dimension’, *City News* [Quest], 21 August 2003, p. 31).

Tom Burns even called his boat *The Electorate* so he could say he was out in the electorate. As a former state AWU secretary said in 1987, ‘too often it would seem some people in the party have been satisfied with the spoils of defeat’ (QPD 1987:vol. 307, p. 4298). During the early 1970s, Labor had attempted to recruit well-known or noteworthy candidates (often with strong track records in local government) to contest marginal seats. For the most part these ‘star’ candidates failed to make it into the Assembly and the culture remained unchanged. By the 1980s, some refused to accept electronic ‘pagers’ because they felt their time was their own. The problem for the ALP was how to jettison time-servers and dullards and recruit new talent that had voter credibility. It was not until the mid-1980s that an entirely new generation of Labor politicians took the fight to the government.

Labor’s leadership: repeated defeats lead to instability

The parliamentary Labor Party went through two distinct periods while in opposition. The first phase was one of stability. From 1958 to 1966, the party was led by Jack Duggan, who was well regarded by the parliamentary rank and file. During this period, there were few alternative leadership contenders in the ALP Caucus. Then, for almost seven years (1966–74), the opposition was led by Jack Houston. After Houston was successfully challenged in mid-1974, Labor plunged into a period of instability, with six leaders during the next 16 years. Like opening batsmen scoring ducks, each Labor leader would face one election and lose, retire to the backbench and let another shadow minister have a go. The revolving leadership came to resemble a round-robin affair, with Caucus asking whose turn would be next. Although Labor gradually clawed some ground back after the devastating loss it suffered in 1974, it looked unlikely to threaten the government’s majority hold on power until the Nationals tried to govern alone and the Fitzgerald Inquiry delivered a powerful issue on which to campaign.

Table 13.1 Labor’s opposition leaders, 1969–89

| ALP leader years served | Election defeat/win | Seats won (Coalition) | Seats won (ALP) | Government majority |
|------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Jack Houston, 1966–74 | 17 May 1969 | 45 | 31 (+ 2 inds) | 12 |
| Jack Houston, 1966–74 | 27 May 1972 | 47 | 33 (+ 2 inds) | 12 |
| Percy Tucker, July–Dec. 1974 | 7 December 1974 | 69 | 11 (+ 2 inds) | 56 |
| Tom Burns, 1974–78 | 12 November 1977 | 59 | 23 | 36 |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------|---|
| Ed Casey, 1978–82 | 29 November 1980 | 57 | 25 | 32 |
| Keith Wright, 1982–84 | 22 October 1983 | 41 (no Coalition) | 32 (+ 8 Libs) | 1 (then 5 after two Liberal defections) |
| Nev Warburton, 1984–88 | 1 November 1986 | 49 (no Coalition) | 30 (+ 10 Libs) | 9 |
| Wayne Goss, 1988–89 | 2 December 1989 (election win) | 27 (+ 8 Libs) | 54 | 19 |

Source: *Queensland Parliamentary Record 2004*.

The first 17 years in opposition under the leaderships of Duggan and Houston coincided with growing dominance of the Trades Hall group in the parliamentary Labor Party (PLP).² Nomination for a parliamentary seat by union or party officials was often viewed as a cushy reward for long-serving apparatchiks rather than as a means of getting the best talent into the Parliament. The Coalition constantly seized on the protracted rivalry and rupture between the parliamentary and organisational wings of the party as evidence of disunity and a Caucus dominated by extra-parliamentary unions. Over time, the ALP lost the support of many regional and provincial voters who had traditionally been loyal supporters. It was not until the 1960 state election that the Labor Party first managed to win more city electorates than country ones (Hughes 1980). The gradual loss of these country seats—which had been a source of electoral strength since the party’s inception—was a demographic shift that was hard to overcome in the short term. It was increasingly apparent that habit voting, old methods of campaigning and tired messages no longer resonated with the changing demographics. Instead of devising ways to attract new constituencies (more educated voters, women, tourism-based regions), however, the party remained loyal to its ideological roots and to its male-dominated, blue-collar constituency.

2 Labor politics in the 1960s and 1970s was far from harmonious. Before federal intervention in 1978, real tensions existed between the previously dominant ALP right faction (which included the AWU in the 1960s) and the leftish Trades Hall group. The AWU was affiliated in the 1960s, but disaffiliated in the 1970s and rejoined in the 1980s. After federal intervention, a new factional realignment occurred with the formation of the Socialist Left group. The ALP was then divided into two broad groups: the former right-wing Trades Hall ‘Old Guard’ plus the AWU versus the Socialist Left and the branch-based Reform Group. The AWU then aligned with the Shop Assistants’ Union and established its own ‘Centre Majority’ faction. Some non-aligned ALP members also established a ‘Centre Left’ faction around Bill Hayden and David Hamill. The ‘unholy alliance’, when the right (AWU-led faction) and the Socialist Left combined against the Old Guard unions, saw the emergence of the rightish Labor Unity faction. The parliamentary Labor Party was considered extraneous to the main action as these various groups battled it out for ideological control of the agenda, which only added to the difficulties for successive Labor leaders (see Fitzgerald and Thornton 1989:173–208). In the Parliament, Old Guard members included Tom Burns, Kev Hooper, Jim Fouras, (initially) Bob Gibbs and Terry Mackenroth. Gibbs then joined the Socialist Left, which was augmented by Anne Warner, Ken Smyth and Ken Hayward. Townsville’s Geoff Smith was for a while the sole AWU-aligned MP. Wayne Goss initially had some AWU backing but remained largely independent; when he won the leadership in 1988, he was supported by all non-Labor Unity members in Caucus (that is, Socialist Left, Centre Majority [AWU], the Centre Left and independents).

Houston's tenure as leader began a period of dominance by the Trades Hall faction in the parliamentary party. His deputy was another Trades Hall sympathiser, Percy Tucker. When Houston stood for the leadership position, he was unsuccessfully challenged by Pat Hanlon, the son of former premier Ned Hanlon, who, according to Harold Dean (ALP, Sandgate, 1966–77), was the 'pick of caucus but lacked the fighting spirit of his father'. Despite Houston's denials that his victory was a Trades Hall takeover (*Courier-Mail*, 3 October 1966), many saw his win as evidence that 'the darling of the left wing of the Labor Party' had come good. His opponents, such as Bill Hewitt, certainly saw the rise of Houston as a sign of the 'strengthening of the Trades Hall grip on the PLP' (*QPD* 1966:vol. 243, p. 867; *Courier-Mail*, 13 October 1966, 14 October 1966). It was not until Wayne Goss was elected leader in 1988 that the Trades Hall unions' dominance over the party would slowly weaken.

Houston created the first full shadow cabinet in Queensland in 1968 (shadowing every ministry), but the government refused to acknowledge his shadow ministry or accept that an alternative government existed. In the official record of *Hansard*, all Houston could do was report his own reappointment as leader, announce Percy Tucker as his deputy and mention that Horace Davies and Doug Sherrington were now the party whip and secretary respectively (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 22). Later, Evan Marginson replaced Sherrington as secretary (*QPD* 1972–73:vol. 259, p. 19). Any official recognition of the shadow ministry was slow in coming. The first listing of a full shadow ministry, published in the *1978 Parliamentary Handbook*, caused such government furore that it was not listed again for many years. According to one contemporary parliamentary librarian, the publication of such a list was not well received by the government. Earlier acknowledgments tended to be more ad hoc or involved occasional slips. In 1968, the Treasurer, Gordon Chalk, referred during the Government Loan Bill debate to his opposite number, Pat Hanlon, as 'the hon. member for Baroona, who no doubt is the shadow Treasurer of the Opposition' (*QPD* 1968:vol. 249, p. 549).

Houston's initial shadow cabinet was elected by Caucus and comprised the leader, the deputy, the party whip and six shadow ministers (a seventh was added in 1969, and four more in 1970). From 1970, all 14 members of the opposition executive were shadowing ministers (Hughes 1980:69). The composition of the first 'shadow cabinet' is shown in Table 13.2.

The existence of a shadow cabinet remained controversial until Mike Ahern became Premier in 1987.

Table 13.2 Jack Houston’s shadow cabinet, 1970

| Shadow portfolio | Shadow minister |
|---|--------------------|
| Premier and State Development | Jack Houston |
| Industrial Development | Percy Tucker |
| Treasury | Pat Hanlon |
| Education and Cultural Affairs | Horace Davis |
| Labour and Tourism | Fred Bromley |
| Works, Housing and Police | Fred Newton |
| Health | Jack Melloy |
| Primary Industries | Edwin Wallis-Smith |
| Lands | Hughie O’Donnell |
| Conservation, Marine and Aboriginal Affairs | Doug Sherrington |
| Justice | Col Bennett |
| Mines and Main Roads | Martin Hanson |
| Transport | Ray Jones |
| Local Government and Electricity | Harold Dean |

Prospects for victory? Labor’s more competitive campaigns, 1969–72

The early years of Bjelke-Petersen’s Premiership were decidedly shaky. He was the default candidate chosen when others had gone and had been long overlooked as a leadership contender by the Country Party’s long-serving and respected leader, Frank Nicklin. With Bjelke-Petersen initially seen as weak and idiosyncratic, the Labor Party sensed it had a chance. When the Speaker, David Nicholson, publicly reprimanded the Premier for misleading the House in 1968, the opposition, sensing blood, repeatedly attacked the Premier on the floor of the Parliament. The Springboks rugby tour of 1971 showed, however, the Queensland electorate another side of this ‘strongman’ leader. Queenslanders susceptible to the lure of a strong, tough leader rewarded their new Premier, who soon learnt that decisiveness and a ‘can-do’ approach were electorally popular.

Perhaps because of Bjelke-Petersen’s woodenness and unpopularity at the start of his term of office, the 1969 and 1972 elections appeared to present realistic opportunities for Labor. Its primary vote was high in both elections (45 per cent in 1969 and 46.75 per cent in 1972). While Labor out-pollled the combined Coalition vote in both elections, its level of popular support did not translate into seats. Labor won 26 seats in 1966, then increased its representation to 31 seats in 1969 to the Coalition’s 45; and again in 1972, Labor managed to capture 33 seats in an expanded parliament to the Coalition’s 47. In 1969, Labor won just five additional seats. Two of these (Bundaberg and Cook) were won

from independents who had previously held the seats as QLP candidates. The Country Party lost Logan (which they had held since its creation in 1960) to Ted Baldwin and the Liberals lost two seats: Rex Pilbeam's seat of Rockhampton South to Keith Wright, and Merv Anderson's seat of Toowoomba East to Peter Wood.

The ALP was philosophical about losing the 1969 election and seemed to have recovered from its devastating split. The party's hopes were dashed, however, in the next two years when the ALP suffered two successive by-election defeats (Albert and Maryborough). Labor's defeat in the July 1971 Maryborough by-election was particularly significant. It had been a safe ALP seat since 1915 and its sudden loss consolidated Bjelke-Petersen's grip on the Premiership.

In spite of these reversals, Labor was attempting to sound positive under Houston's leadership and, according to one-time deputy leader, Jack Melloy, the 1972 election was one Labor felt certain it could win. Houston was becoming a 'steady parliamentary performer' and momentum seemed to be building in the ALP's favour. This optimism was aided by a fall in the government's majority—from 20 seats in 1966 down to just 12 seats in 1969—a decline attributed largely to Bjelke-Petersen's initial weak performance as leader (see Chapter 8 for details).

Just as Labor was becoming competitive, it descended into another bout of internal party brawling over factional influence. Three right-wing sitting members, Ed Casey, Col Bennett and Merv Thackeray, failed to hold onto preselection for their safe seats early in 1972 (*Sunday Sun*, 30 January 1972). It was rumoured that up to 10 members were threatened with dis-endorsement and that three sitting members had approached the DLP seeking its support in the event ALP endorsement was withdrawn (Hughes 1980:69–70). This blatant factional move was described as a 'Trades Hall purge'; the axing of three parliamentarians prompted a former speaker and life member of the ALP, Johnno Mann, to resign from the party in protest. It signalled the strengthening of the left-aligned Trades Hall group over the parliamentary Labor Party. One of the dis-endorsed parliamentarians (and a future Labor leader), Ed Casey, was returned as an independent for Mackay. Casey was very bitter, claiming that parliamentary democracy had been eroded by the factional stoush. He accused Houston of taking instructions from the 'inner executive' of the ALP and reported that over the past six months Houston had 'dispensed with shadow cabinet meetings' and had not called Caucus together (*Courier-Mail*, 12 October 1972).

Surprisingly, given the internal difficulties, Labor did even better in the 1972 election, achieving a high-water mark not surpassed until it finally won office in 1989. Labor's gains were limited, however, because of a new electoral redistribution. In August 1971, the *Electoral District Act 1971* had increased the

number of electorates from 78 to 82 and the number of differently weighted zones from three to four. The south-eastern zone now held 47 seats; the provincial cities zone had 13 seats; the western and far northern zone had seven; while the country zone contained 15. The most disadvantaged party as a result of these electoral changes was the Liberal Party. Despite Labor's increase in primary votes (rising to 46.75 per cent), the opposition won only two additional seats while the Country Party retained all its seats despite a drop of more than 1 per cent of its vote. Labor had out-pollled the combined Coalition vote by 4.5 per cent across the state, so felt cheated by the outcome and complained publicly for years about the effects of the government's malapportionment. Labor appeared to be on an upward trajectory, especially as federal Labor was to win office under Gough Whitlam only six months later, in December 1972.

After suffering defeat at the 1972 election, the Labor Party started to 'fall apart again', according to former members. The Trades Hall group continued to throw its weight around and had consolidated its position at the election. Labor dissidents, such as Ed Casey, argued that the party needed 'someone who can pull the ALP in Queensland back on the rails and make it the great party that it was' (*Courier-Mail*, 12 October 1972). With morale dented, speculation began to emerge about a change of leadership. The *Sun*, for example, in a prescient editorial, damned Houston with faint praise, saying:

Under the looming shadow of Jack Duggan, we say Jack Houston has performed well. His debating skill has improved enormously; he has a presence and an integrity recognised by all parties. But some of the new Labor members in Parliament, backed by some of the outside Labor bosses, think he has not been forceful enough. And despite Labor's proud boast that once it has chosen a leader the party sticks by him, the odds against Mr Houston being allowed to hang on much longer are shortening fast. (*Sun*, 8 May 1973)

One of Houston's perennial image problems was that he had long been considered a 'personable, non-aggressive leader' (*Courier-Mail*, 16 June 1966), perhaps unable to go for the political jugular. The press by now depicted his performances as weak and lacklustre. Houston was finally removed after a sudden party-room vote in July 1974, which was initiated by Percy Tucker after he gave indications to Houston that he would not challenge.

Tucker was supposedly Houston's loyal deputy, but agreed to stand against him in 1974 with a commitment to be more aggressive against the government. Regarded as a robust and forceful character, Tucker surprised many when he won the internal ballot over the more high-profile Tom Burns. Tucker held the marginal seat of Townsville West and was the first ALP leader to have held a seat outside the south-east of the state since Forgan Smith (who had held

Mackay, but who as Premier resided in Brisbane). Encouraged by a small group of parliamentary supporters, Tucker toppled Houston by two votes (17–15). The momentum for the change had, however, come entirely from within the parliamentary Caucus—not from the extra-parliamentary unions. Casey's assertion that the party's 'inner executive' at Trades Hall was running the show did not appear to be true in this case. The State President, Jack Egerton, was overseas, and following the new leader's appointment, there was some criticism that the unions had not been consulted (Hughes 1980:71).

Facing annihilation, years in the wilderness: 1974–80

The election of the Whitlam government had a devastating impact on the state-based Labor Party. Whitlam polarised Queensland, attracting ardent supporters but increasingly mobilising vehement opponents. By 1974, Queenslanders, especially in country and regional areas, despised the new Prime Minister and Bjelke-Petersen took every opportunity to drive the wedge deeper. In the Parliament, the opposition failed to lessen the effect of the government's continued assault on federal Labor. As a new leader, Tucker was keen to assert his leadership credentials and foolishly challenged the Premier to call an early election on the issue of unemployment (something Chalk had been talking about for a while before Bjelke-Petersen finally acted). Tucker's much-quoted challenge to Bjelke-Petersen was at the time—and in retrospect—a stupendous error of judgment. When Bjelke-Petersen obliged the Opposition Leader and announced the election, the result was entirely predictable. Labor lost 22 seats, reducing it from 33 seats to 11. Labor lost many of its recent electoral gains (Albert, Isis, Redlands, Toowoomba East and Pine Rivers), but also many traditional seats. Tucker lost his own seat in the onslaught, as did his deputy, Fred Newton, and was replaced as leader by Burns, who was the only conceivable candidate.

Burns was a relative newcomer to the Parliament, yet as a former state secretary he had much party experience outside the Assembly. Despite his easygoing and calm demeanour, Burns soon found he could not run the gauntlet of the internal disunity ailing the ALP. The internal disarray was so dire in the 1970s, the federal ALP threatened direct intervention in a bid to end the warfare (Fitzgerald and Thornton 1989:262; *Courier-Mail*, 1 August 1978). Burns was an affable, 'straight-talking, no nonsense' ideas man, but was replaced as leader after just three years (see Murphy 1980:156). He gave the ALP some much-needed professionalism and a fillip after the 1974 electoral loss but from such a low base electoral victory was inconceivable.

From 1974 to 1977, the government ran the Parliament with a ‘business-as-usual’ approach, showing minimal regard for the opposition. Leading the parliamentary Labor Party, with its 11 members and party confidence at an all-time low, was a tough assignment. The opposition appeared aimless and, in stark comparison with the session before, only two Labor members were suspended as the government relaxed its control and allowed the ALP to vent its spleen. Labor’s efforts to shed light into the dark recesses of the government amounted to little. Queensland voters seemed immune to the opposition’s complaints over the growing police state, serial ‘states of emergency’ and constant police interference in civic life. Still, Labor slowly regrouped and received a slight return in voter support at the 1977 election.

Although Labor doubled its numbers at the 1977 poll (to 23 seats), it appealed only to its bedrock of loyalist supporters for a further six years, capturing only two more seats in 1980. The 1977 electoral loss ended Burns’ short stint as leader, although he waited until after the 1978 Sherwood by-election to resign. He stayed on the backbench for six years before being appointed deputy leader under Nev Warburton in 1984. Burns would finally be rewarded for his service and loyalty when Wayne Goss appointed him as Deputy Premier after the ALP’s victory in 1989. In 1978, the Caucus turned to the renegade Ed Casey, who found he had just two years to establish his leadership credentials before the electoral term expired. He too would face just one election and bow out of the role in 1982.

Satisfied with the spoils of defeat

In the early 1980s, the ALP was in the midst of a bitter internal reform process forced on it by federal intervention. Reformers argued the reform process was long overdue, yet it caused considerable political and financial distress within the party and was deeply resented by the ‘Old Guard’ unions. From the torment of the reform came the creation of competing factions—dominated by different wings of the union movement: the ‘Old Guard’ (Labor Unity faction), the Socialist Left and the AWU faction.

The government used these internecine conflicts to portray the ALP as a party riddled with internal squabbles and unable to govern. It proved an effective message. In the Parliament, the Premier constantly reminded Queenslanders of the parlous state of the alternative government. He was wont to taunt the Labor factions by referring to them as ‘the old guard, the new guard, the mud guard’. Scathing of Casey’s leadership, Bjelke-Petersen claimed in a dissent motion:

The history and performance of the Leader of the Opposition—publicly, privately and politically—have not been very creditable. He has been

in and out of business and has left a trail of wreckage. He has been in and out of the Labor Party and has caused much havoc. He is even now in conflict with his own Executive and his own party, as well as with others, both in his party and outside it, with whom he cannot live in harmony...The ALP style of politics in Queensland has reached an all-time low. Its smears, innuendoes, character assassination, rumours, half truths, disruption of Parliamentary proceedings and community life, support for rule from the street, lack of respect for you, Mr Speaker and Parliament itself, have been the trade mark of Labor under the Leader of the Opposition...That will be the story that the historians will tell if they take the trouble to write anything seriously about the Leader of the Opposition. (*QPD* 1979:vol. 279, p. 804)

Casey hit back during the valedictory addresses the next year with his version of how the Parliament was failing the people of Queensland:

Mr Casey: Parliament has creaked its way through the rituals of suppressing the very information that it should be providing for the people of Queensland. For three years it has virtually roared and snored its objections to the freedoms of expression and debate that should be the basis of its existence. Question-time is a joke and ministerial statements have become a time-abusing farce.

Mr Bjelke-Petersen: You make them a farce.

Mr Casey: The Premier and his Ministers should allow ministerial statements to be debated, as they are in other Parliaments. We would then see how often Ministers made use of that practice, which often cuts down on question-time. (*QPD* 1980:vol. 282, p. 819)

In response, the Premier rose, calling a point of order—a rarity during a valedictory speech. Yet in reality he had little to be worried about. Casey could not turn Labor's fortunes around.

Polls conducted in the lead-up to the 1980 election indicated that the ALP had little chance of wresting government away from the Coalition. Defiant to the end, Casey rejected this analysis, remaining 'convinced that his party could win' (*Melbourne Argus*, 22 October 1980). His optimism could have come from the outbreak of increased tension between the conservative parties, which both ran separate campaigns and were quite openly hostile to each other. Still, Labor found it hard to gain traction. *The Australian* (28 November 1980) summed up their plight in the lead-up to the 1980 election, saying:

One feels sorry for the Labor Party. Its limited advertising shows they are out of funds; they have two separate organisations [the old and new

guard] campaigning and authorising advertisements; and in contrast with the flamboyant campaign of former federal president Mr Tom Burns three years ago, Mr Casey is very dull.

Even the most loyal Labor supporter could not help but be dismayed by the ineptitude and mistakes that continually emerged from the two disaffected party organisations. The Premier, who was constantly able to depict Labor as unready to form a viable government, mercilessly exploited this factional discontent. Journalist Peter Morley noted that ‘in 1980, it was personalities not ideologies which split the...party’ (*Courier-Mail*, 27 June 1984). Some ‘small-l’ Liberal backbenchers (who were increasingly compromised by the actions of the executive) even began to feel sorry for the opposition, and some began to ‘coach’ the ALP members, reminding them that the role and performance of the opposition were ‘extremely important’ to the Parliament (see Rosemary Kyburz, in *QPD* 1979:vol. 279, p. 755).

Union control over the parliamentary Labor Party was a constant theme of criticism from the government. A typical exchange, regarding the power of the extra-parliamentary executive of the ALP, occurred in the 1982 estimates debate for the Department of Transport. Terry Gygar (Lib., Stafford) challenged Brian Davis (ALP, Brisbane Central) about the ALP’s stance on an inquiry into the railways:

Perhaps he would like to take a point of order and tell the Committee when was the last time that he voted against the directions of the Trades Hall. I think Vince Gair was the boy who last did that. And look what happened to him in 1957. The puppet masters...are pulling the strings, and their puppets in this Chamber are dancing to the tune. Why, I do not know. One can only speculate that they are doing it for some motive, because they are not totally mindless, no matter how they might display themselves in this Chamber. (*QPD* 1982:vol. 289, p. 2308)

Rival ALP factions were each challenging the legitimacy of the others, while seeking control of the party as a whole. Litigation was inevitable. In July 1981, the Queensland Supreme Court determined that the new administration was legally entitled to regard itself as the Queensland Branch of the ALP. Such determinations, however, served only to reinforce popular perceptions of disunity, and did nothing to eradicate the internal feuds in the short term.

Attacks on corruption by the opposition

From the early 1980s, the opposition began to attack the government over corruption and misconduct issues. Kev Hooper (Archerfield), as spokesman for

Police and Prisons (a position he had held since 1974), was relentless in the House on these issues, constantly raising allegations about drug trafficking, prostitution, illegal gambling and SP bookmaking. He argued these types of activities could not flourish without the institutional protection of the Police Force, the Police Department and various ministers in government. Hooper talked about illegal casinos operating in Fortitude Valley. Hooper named two of the known operators: Geraldo Bellino and Vittorio Conte. He adversely named the Police Commissioner, Terry Lewis, and Assistant Commissioner, Tony Murphy. Years later, during the Fitzgerald Inquiry, his statements in the House—and reported in newspapers such as the *Telegraph*—became exhibits because the allegations were found to be virtually true regarding SP bookmaking. The *Fitzgerald Report* (1989:54) discussed information in Terry Lewis's diaries that suggested that Hooper was receiving information from senior police officers as early as 1978 about police misconduct. Hooper also advocated for justice for Lorrelle Saunders, a police officer who was jailed due to false evidence, but later exonerated. Ed Casey was also active in making allegations about undue influence or favouritism in the awarding of government contracts.

Within two years of the 1980 election loss, however, Labor was again undermining the standing of its leader. It was again looking for an alternative candidate who could match it with the government. Casey's personal opposition to abortion law reform and his dislike of federal intervention did not help garnish him any support. He claimed that he had been 'subjected to a stream of criticism from sources within the party designed to destroy public confidence in [his] capacity to govern' (*Sunday Mail*, 10 February 1980, cited in Fitzgerald and Thornton 1989:323).

The Coalition could hardly believe its luck and pounced on these new cracks in Labor's facade. They sensed an opportunity to prosper from the ALP embarking on yet another leadership change. Ian Prentice, a Liberal Party moderate, provided sarcastic commentary during a debate on a matter of public interest:

I have stood in this Parliament previously and criticised the Labor Party for being subject to outside direction. Although I do not necessarily change that view I must say that I have come to realise over the past few days how understandable it is. Its capacity for decision-making is wanting. If it is a matter of giving examples, one example is that the major task of any party in any Parliament is to select a leader, one man who can lead an Opposition into government. What has the Opposition done in this regard? Following the last election it selected one, Ed Casey. He is a kindly man who has done the party well. No sooner did he get into power than Opposition members started wheeling and dealing behind the back door, in the bar, in the garage and round the traps to get rid of him. He had been there for five minutes and they tried to knock

him off. It is accepted in every Parliament that party members have a right to elect their leader [but] not every week. If Opposition members could wind up their energy, get people to talk to one another and decide on a person who should be elected as leader—even if they did it every week—I would say that they had the ability to make a decision. But no, they have not even got that far... We are on the eve of the Battle of the ALP. It will be interesting to learn who disappears into the mire, never to raise his hopes again. (QPD 1982:vol. 289, pp. 1593–4)

The ambitious Keith Wright emerged from the fray and was elected leader in October 1982. Neville Warburton was appointed as his deputy, replacing the articulate but ineffectual Bill D’Arcy. They were supported in their bid by both the union and the administrative wings of the ALP (Fitzgerald and Thornton 1989:325). Despite being a generation younger than the Premier, Wright, a Baptist lay preacher, shared a similar belief system to his political adversary in the House. Wright claimed, for example, that ‘once you enter the political arena, there’s no protection other than the on-going promise Christ has given us’. Divine protection allowed the devout Wright to ‘embark on a course that may not be popular, because I believe I am within God’s Will in that area’ (*National Times*, 3–9 August 1984). Despite Wright’s confidence that divine intervention would reverse the ALP’s fortunes, he made little impact in the election of 1983.

One major change made by Wright was to replace the shadow ministry with a system of eight committees chaired by members of his new executive. The experimental committee system comprised the portfolio areas headed by shadow ministry members (Table 13.3).

Table 13.3 Keith Wright’s eight shadow committee arrangements

| Portfolio responsibility | Opposition shadow minister |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Economic Strategy | Keith Wright |
| Development and Employment | Nev Warburton |
| Justice and Law Reform | Bob Gibbs |
| Local Government | Eric Shaw |
| Rural | Ed Casey |
| Family Welfare | Terry Mackenroth |
| Transport and Public Facilities | Les Yewdale |
| Environment, Tourism and Leisure | Tom Burns |

The experiment was, however, short-lived and within a year the eight committees were abandoned.³

³ By 4 November 1983, the Caucus had decided to return to the former arrangement of a shadow ministry. Wright supported this move although it was not his initiative.

Federal Labor's victory in 1983 buoyed the spirits of the state ALP. In the months leading up to the 1983 state election, Wright unveiled the party's 'new direction', emphasising reform to the Parliament, the public service, the electoral system and to the economy. 'Keith Wright—the New Direction' was the unimaginative slogan for the election campaign. The *Courier-Mail's* editorial (16 June 1983) considered this new direction 'sensible and realistic' and believed that it struck at the heart of the government's weaknesses: 'the unreasonable attitude to the electoral system; the apparent disdain for the institution of Parliament; the increase in power of Cabinet. In a word, the Government's style.' This so-called 'style' implied arrogance, complacency and disdain. The Parliament was not recalled for seven months during the height of the Coalition crisis, so fearful was the government of a no-confidence motion. Criticism of the government's attitude towards the Parliament grew louder as the ALP and the Liberal backbench became frustrated by the chaotic nature of the government's legislative program. A typical example was Wright's criticism that over four months

[w]e have sat for 11 days. Last week there was a sitting to 2.15 am and another one to 2 am. This morning we sat until 4 am, and we are still sitting at 1.15 am today. Why? It is because of the way in which the Government is running the Parliament. The Government runs the Parliament as if it is running a Saturday afternoon flea market. It has no idea what is important. It is not prepared to give proper consideration to the legislation that comes before the Assembly. (*QPD* 1982:vol. 290, p. 4157)

The domineering Bjelke-Petersen suddenly appeared more vulnerable in 1983 and Wright hit the campaign trail with a vengeance and with confidence he might win. Labor's unequivocal message was that in contrast with the feuding conservative parties, it was disciplined and united. Although some in the party thought realistically that they were gearing up to fight the 'one after' election (that is, 1986).

The 1983 election was a pivotal one for Queensland, with the Nationals and Liberals contesting as separate entities. The former coalition arrangement was in tatters and the old adage about 'keeping your enemies close' seemed not to be heeded on the conservative side. Llew Edwards had been toppled from the Liberal leadership and replaced with Terry White, who Bjelke-Petersen refused to accept back into the cabinet or as leader. Seven Liberal ministers then resigned as a protest against the Premier's stance. At the grassroots level, two long-serving Liberals, Bob Moore (Windsor) and Bill Kaus (Mansfield), defected to the Nationals after losing Liberal endorsement. Suddenly, the government was in disarray and Wright could portray himself as the Premier in waiting. He released details of his intended cabinet and gave notice that the Treasury

portfolio would be replaced with two departments: finance and economic development (*Daily Sun*, 15 October 1983). While Wright was presented with a golden opportunity, he had not calculated on the power of incumbency, the superior campaign the Nationals would manage or the money the Nationals would be able to muster to fight the campaign on television. Local media reports predicting the dawn of a new era were premature (*Sunday Sun*, 16 October 1983).

The 22 October 1983 election result proved Bjelke-Petersen's gamble paid off: his party alone was now able to form the Government of Queensland. As the ALP ruefully returned to the opposition benches, Tom Burns rose on the first sitting day after the election bemoaning that after a two and a half month adjournment, the Parliament had spent

half a day on an abortive motion moved by the Premier. The debate was gagged by the Government. The Premier stopped his own Deputy Leader from speaking in the debate. Question-time has been taken up by long statements and Dorothy Dixers. I ask you, Mr Speaker, to table the cost of calling this Parliament together for a three-day session, to be misused for political purposes by the Liberal and the National Parties. Where were the Premier and Deputy Premier and Treasurer for the whole of question-time on the first day that this Parliament sat after a long recess? It is a scandal, and we are entitled to better treatment. (*QPD* 1983:vol. 290, p. 3094)

It appeared that business was back to normal for the Queensland Parliament.

The 1983 poll impacted on the Liberal Party so severely that it has never fully recovered from the debacle. It lost a total of 14 seats and was reduced to only six parliamentarians after the post-election defections of Don Lane and Brian Austin to the National ministry. The election was also a turning point for the ALP, which had won seven new seats, but had returned 10 new members. Many of these would be integral to the party's ultimate victory in 1989, including: Wayne Goss, Pat Comben, Keith De Lacy, David Hamill, Ken McElligott and Anne Warner. Labor's gains in 1983 were its best result since the Labor split of 1956. After the election, one columnist, Malcolm Farr, writing the 'George Street Beat', remarked that

[t]he party [now] has the makings of one [of] the most effective groups of spokesmen for the past 20 years. Some of them are so bright and young they make the power merchants on the Government benches look grey and tired in comparison. There is a plan to improve the shadow front bench by making way for bright-young things Pat Comben, Bill Price, David Hamill and Keith De Lacy. (*Sunday Sun*, 12 August 1984)

Other commentators were less positive and viewed the 1983 result as disappointing for Labor when considered alongside the disarray of the conservatives. Labor won 32 seats—19 in Brisbane and the south-east and 13 from the country and provincial towns. It lost the seat of Maryborough again (this time with the former Liberal member Gil Alison taking the seat as a National, from Brendan Hansen), and while party reformer Denis Murphy claimed the seat of Stafford from the Liberals, he died the next year after a battle with cancer that precluded him from making any sort of impact in the Parliament. Murphy appeared on the floor of the Chamber three times— first to be sworn in, the second time for the condolence motion of another Labor warrior, Kevin Hooper (*Telegraph*, 27 March 1984), and finally to attend the last sitting day of the session. He did not survive long enough to make his maiden address. Murphy had been earmarked as a potential leader, but his legacy lay in his work outside the parliamentary arena. His eulogy in the House paid tribute to his commitment to the labour cause while his blueprint for reform contributed to the eventual revival of the party.

Despite the optimism Labor had shown before the 1983 poll, the subsequent Labor convention was 'like observing tribal warfare...where the atmosphere [was] poisonous and volatile' (*Australian Financial Review*, 27 June 1984). Wright warned the convention that the ALP must stop its internal factional bickering if it wanted to 'smash the National Party's stranglehold' (*Daily Sun*, 27 June 1984). Later, he agreed that 'anyone seeing the Labor Party on display there would have been disgusted. If the ALP is going to be the government it has to clean up its faction[al] fighting.' As Wright said, 'it's no wonder traditional ALP voters won't support us' (*Telegraph*, 8 August 1984).

Foreshadowing changes to his shadow ministry line-up, Wright criticised some on his frontbench, claiming they tended to be 'lazy and undisciplined' (*Daily Sun*, 9 August 1984). While he had indicated that should he fail to win the next election he would stand down as leader, he would not be given that opportunity. By August 1984, the media was arguing that he did not have a 'firm hand on the tiller' (*Sunday Sun*, 12 August 1984). His position was further eroded when the Liberals reclaimed Denis Murphy's seat of Stafford in the by-election caused by his death. Wright then made some headway in uniting the administrative and parliamentary wings. He reported that the two bodies had 'agreed to get together and fight the true opponent'. His plan included a direct parliamentary assault on ministers the ALP regarded as weak or ineffective, including: Martin Tenni, Vince Lester, Bob Katter, Peter McKechnie and Bill Gunn (*Daily Sun*, 21 August 1984). Despite Wright's plans, he did not survive long enough to give effect to any strategy. The truce between the organisational and political factions was short-lived and, within a week of this announcement, Wright quit state politics, opting to contest the federal seat of Capricornia (which he subsequently won).

Press reports blamed the Stafford by-election loss and the failure of the party to revamp its frontbench as contributing causes leading to Wright's resignation. In reality it was more likely that if he had not gone voluntarily, he would have been pushed.

The steady, if colourless Nev Warburton was selected as the sixth Labor leader to front up to Bjelke-Petersen (and the ninth since the Coalition won office in 1957). The Premier was reportedly unperturbed by these events, saying Warburton was 'just like the others' (*Daily Sun*, 29 August 1984). Labor's Lazarus, Tom Burns, was returned as deputy leader. In the Parliament—now governed by the Nationals alone—little had changed and there was no relaxation of the procedures to allow more probing opposition scrutiny. A few newer members gained attention attacking the government's fiscal and social policies, but this was deflected by a confident ministry, which seemed unconcerned by Labor's efforts. Helpful rulings by the incoming National Party Speaker, John Warner, bolstered its confidence.

Warburton responded to suggestions Labor were poor economic managers by releasing an economic strategy, but this was mocked by the Premier and the local press. The Premier dismissed the plan by saying '[w]hat a strategy it was! What a disaster! Mr Invisible and his policies were roundly ignored almost everywhere he went. His strategy was branded a failure. Honourable members do not have to take my word for that' (*QPD* 1985:vol. 299, p. 137).

He then taunted the opposition by repeating media reports calling for the ALP to 'take the strategy back to the drawing-board'. He quoted the paper as saying 'apart from other faults the plan is dull. It lacks imagination and flair qualities' (*QPD* 1985:vol. 299, p. 137).

The 1986 election: further attempts to make corruption allegations stick

If Labor was disheartened by its successive defeats, it often comforted itself with the aspiration that it might do better at the 'one after'. This was never truer than after 1983. Yet, according to the Labor State Secretary, Peter Beattie, the party had, at every electoral campaign since 1957, 'pinned their hopes on the "next" election'. While Labor had faced 10 defeats in a row, somehow the 1983 result seemed to change the landscape for Labor. Gradually, the parliamentary party became more disciplined and displayed signs it was ready to govern. Beattie again asserted that the ALP now had the 'confidence and determination to win' (*Daily Sun*, 27 June 1984). This time, the party's finances were in a healthy state, helping the party gain momentum. New polling also gave reason for optimism.

A Morgan Gallup poll published in July 1984 indicated that the ALP had 47 per cent acceptance among Queensland voters while the National Party had only 35 per cent and the Liberals recorded just 14.5 per cent (*Courier-Mail*, 18 July 1984). Reports suggested an ALP victory was possible for the first time in decades. Bjelke-Petersen dismissed these reports out of hand, quipping that there 'should be a poll on whether or not there should be opinion polls' (*Daily Sun*, 18 July 1984).

The revolving door of Labor's leadership incumbents continued, however, to harm the party's chances. The *Australian Financial Review* (30 August 1984) characterised the selection of Warburton as a continuation of the conservatism of the Queensland ALP as well as a sign of compromise between the right and left factions. In reality it was a sign that the Old Guard (Labor Unity faction) was still exercising its muscle within the Caucus. An editorial in the *Courier-Mail* (30 August 1984) suggested, using rugby metaphors, that while Wright was 'a stylish, erratic wing three-quarter' what Labor needed was 'a bullocking, hard-working, tight-head prop'. Warburton's 1986 campaign slogans, 'Nev Warburton—your honest choice for Queensland' and the equally unimaginative 'Nev for Premier', indicated Labor had not gauged the electorate well. It signalled that any flamboyancy among the leadership of the past had well and truly evaporated.

Warburton's frontbench continued toiling away trying to expose corruption and a general lack of accountability. Wayne Goss—one of the Parliament's best performers—Tom Burns and Bob Gibbs sought to make concerted attacks on the government over the issue of corruption and alleged conflicts of interest. They highlighted ministerial land grabs for so-called 'friends' of the National Party, conflicts of interest over ministerial business interests (so-called 'extra-parliamentary activities') and secret defamation settlements involving cash payments to the Premier. For instance, during 1985, the opposition became fixated on Russ Hinze's acquisition of a TAB licence for his Oxenford pub. Goss claimed that due to this repeated questioning in the House, Hinze was forced to hand back the licence (see Chapter 15; *QPD* 1985:vol. 299, p. 1227). Allegations were also made about Alan Bond's \$400 000 cash payment to the Premier to settle a defamation matter (*QPD* 1986:vol. 303, p. 37). The government appeared unconcerned by the opposition's attack until suddenly in 1987 its accusations were given some credence when Deputy Premier, Bill Gunn, announced the Fitzgerald Inquiry into police corruption. As early as 1985, Goss claimed in the Parliament that the evidence mounting against the government was convincing:

The evidence that the Opposition has presented is overwhelming, and in any other State...it would be enough to bring down the relevant Minister and, possibly, the Government of the day. However, it is a sad commentary on the quality of this Government and politics in

Queensland that it is often said that proving an overwhelming case...is not enough in Queensland—you have to catch them red-handed. That makes the job of the Opposition so much harder; but so be it. (*QPD* 1985:vol. 299, p. 324)

The allegations of cronyism and corruption gained additional leverage when the Premier's former media adviser, Allen Callaghan, was jailed for misappropriation. Despite an unfavourable electoral redistribution in 1985, the ALP remained optimistic in the lead-up to the 1986 poll. The government's woes did not, however, translate into automatic approval for the ALP. With polls showing Warburton's approval rating had slumped to 29 per cent, he was the 'least popular ALP leader in Queensland's recent political history' (*QPD* 1985:vol. 301, pp. 2333–4). Moreover, because of the ALP's continuing organisational conflicts, the conservative parties still had cause to press the theme that the 'ALP was a party of warring factions' (Bill Knox in the *Courier-Mail*, 27 June 1984).

In reality, the government was becoming more than a little concerned about such attacks. The blatant 1985 electoral redistribution was evidence of how much the government was worried and felt it needed to corral the Labor vote. The issues of corruption raised by opposition members in the House over many years did not, however, gain real traction with the voters until early 1987. Despite the electorate's apparent complacency, suddenly the opposition's accusations were given some credence after a series of investigative reports in the *Courier-Mail* by journalist Phil Dickie and an ABC *Four Corners* program, 'The Moonlight State', concerning police corruption.

Renewal and finally becoming electable: 1986–89

Despite a concerted effort in 1986, Labor was again thwarted at the polls. Warburton proved to be no charismatic leader or natural vote winner and Labor's poor showing saw it lose two seats and its vote fall by 2.63 per cent overall. The conservative Old Guard had not offered an attractive option outside Labor's heartland. Warburton was therefore allowed his obligatory 'one go' and, once a major factional realignment took place, he was given his marching orders and replaced by one of Labor's best prospects, the young Wayne Goss. This was the time—in the dying days of the Bjelke-Petersen government—when Peter Beattie made the assessment that 'too often it would seem some people in the party have been satisfied with the spoils of defeat' (*QPD* 1987:vol. 307, p.

4295). Senior Nationals such as Russell Cooper were delighted to reiterate these words in the Parliament, implying Labor was still a complacent opposition more interested in its own internal machinations than in public administration.

Throughout these wilderness years, the ALP had been its own worst enemy. It was frequently caught between a rock and a hard place. For example, during the debate on the Drugs Misuse Bill (*QPD* 1986:vol. 303, p. 459), the ALP allowed bad policy to get in the way of political tactics. Despite having major reservations about the legislation and agreeing with the Bar Association's view that the bill was 'barbaric' legislation (*Daily Sun*, 2 October 1986), the ALP was too scared of being labelled 'soft on drugs' by its political adversaries to really oppose the bill. While such assessments might seem to be overly harsh with hindsight, the Drugs Misuse case indicates the intense pressure the ALP was under. It sought to defend civil liberties while attempting to appeal to a largely conservative voter bloc that had responded favourably to years of 'tough-on-crime' rhetoric and strong government actions. Finding the middle ground was a tactical nightmare.

Labor was jolted out of its complacency by the sudden removal of Bjelke-Petersen from the political scene in late 1987. A generational change saw Mike Ahern installed as Premier with a new team and fresh agenda. Bob Gibbs summed up the general feeling in the Labor camp at the removal of Bjelke-Petersen: 'It is...a day of great relief to the members of the Opposition—the day that...Bjelke-Petersen has departed this Parliament. One can understand their relief and light-heartedness at losing such an abhorrent person from the scene of Queensland politics' (*QPD* 1987:vol. 307, p. 4741).

Warburton welcomed the passing of Bjelke-Petersen but seemed to disapprove of the manner by which Ahern and his lieutenants conducted the coup in the last days of November 1987. He also spoke of the former Speaker, Kev Lingard, 'swimming ambitiously towards that sunken flagship of the National Party', referring to the friends of Bjelke-Petersen group who had tried to rally around the former Premier in his last days (*QPD* 1987:vol. 307, p. 4738). Warburton's own days as party leader were, however, also numbered.

Behind the scenes, the tired factions of the Labor Party had ceased warring for the moment. A new spirit of 'consociationalism' now prevailed (see Wanna 2000) and agreements were hammered out to ensure power-sharing arrangements between the factions that guaranteed factional representation. In particular, an 'unholy alliance' between the right and left (the AWU and the Socialist Left) not only introduced a new stability in the organisational wing but increased the focus on the leadership of the parliamentary party. The impetus for a leadership spill in the parliamentary party gathered momentum and both groupings

became convinced of the need for a new leader. They pooled their numbers and rallied behind one of the more outspoken AWU-aligned shadow ministers, Wayne Goss.

When the Parliament met on 8 March 1988, Goss announced to the House that he was the new Opposition Leader. Tom Burns was reappointed as deputy leader. In the Parliament, the new team faced a new Premier, Mike Ahern, and a new Liberal leader, Angus Innes. Goss was permitted to table his full shadow cabinet in the House and it was included in *Hansard* for the first time (*QPD* 1988:vol. 307, p. 4846). This was a small but significant indication that the opposition represented an alternative government in waiting.

Table 13.4 Wayne Goss’s shadow cabinet, 1988

| Shadow portfolio | Shadow minister |
|---|------------------|
| Opposition Leader, Shadow Treasurer and the Arts | Wayne Goss |
| Deputy Opposition Leader, Police and Main Roads | Tom Burns |
| Justice and Attorney-General, Community Services | Paul Braddy |
| Primary Industries | Ed Casey |
| Health, Environment and Conservation | Pat Comben |
| Tourism, Sport and Racing | Bill D’Arcy |
| Finance | Keith De Lacy |
| Land Management and Forestry | Bill Eaton |
| Mines and Energy | Bob Gibbs |
| Education and Youth | David Hamill |
| Works, Welfare, Housing and Family Services | Terry Mackenroth |
| Regional and Northern Development and Small Business | Ken McElligott |
| Water Resources and Maritime Services | Ron McLean |
| Industry, Communications, Technology and Consumer Affairs | Glen Milliner |
| Local Government and Expo | Eric Shaw |
| Corrective Services and Administrative Services | Geoff Smith |
| Transport | David Underwood |
| Employment, Training and Industrial Affairs | Ken Vaughan |

Warburton was not included in Goss’s shadow ministry. From this list all but three would feature in Goss’s first cabinet when the ALP was elected on 2 December 1989. Eric Shaw became an independent in 1988, after a preselection battle in Manly that saw the AWU’s Jim Elder nominated for the seat. Elder won the seat for the government in 1989 and became a minister in 1992. Bill D’Arcy (‘the phantom’) never sat in the ministry, but would remain in the Parliament

until January 2000, becoming Chairman of Committees for one term. He raised the ire of Goss after he missed a crucial vote in the House in July 1989 and was subsequently suspended from Caucus for three months and from official party positions for one year. David Underwood announced his resignation from the Assembly before the poll, becoming the Labor Mayor of Ipswich in 1991 before breaking with the party and holding that office as an independent.

Goss had 20 months before the next election to make an impact. He immediately began to pressure the Premier to accept responsibility for what had occurred during his time as a minister in the Bjelke-Petersen cabinet. Ahern denounced these attempts as imposing ‘guilt by association’ but some mud inevitably stuck (see *QPD* 1988:vol. 310, pp. 1630–1). When the by-election in the Merthyr seat of disgraced former National minister Don Lane was held in May 1989, it was the Liberals who were victorious—a change of government at the next election was not a foregone conclusion. Goss tried numerous tactics to weaken the standing of the National Party.

Goss’s attack focused on the leader and a few long-term ministers. He used a comparison with Bjelke-Petersen’s tough and dogmatic style to depict Ahern as weak and vacillating. De Lacy also pushed the theme by poking fun at the Premier and saying he needed lessons on ‘how to look tough, to act tough and to develop the appropriate gestures—close the fist, thump the table, raise the voice and narrow the eyes’ (*QPD* 1988:vol. 310, p. 1759). Deriding Ahern’s statement that he would ‘make an important decision each week’, Goss asked the House if ‘anyone [could] imagine Joh Bjelke-Petersen having to actually announce that he was going to make a decision?’ (*QPD* 1989:vol. 313, p. 13). The ALP observed opinion polls showing the public perceived the Premier as weak and indecisive. It was Ahern’s history as a cabinet minister under Bjelke-Petersen that was, however, the ALP’s main target. A typical contribution was Goss’s statement that

there is no such thing as retrospective honesty...[Ahern] is the only person in the National Party ranks in this House who served through the entire Bjelke-Petersen Premiership. He sat as a Government member for 12 years and in Cabinet for eight years. In all that time, is there evidence of Mike Ahern ever raising his voice against corruption in public, in the party room, in Parliament or in Cabinet? No! (*QPD* 1988:vol. 309, pp. 1044–5)⁴

Labor’s strategy was now twofold: to push corruption as a major indictment of the government’s stewardship and to begin to assemble its own reformist agenda in preparation for government.

4 The Liberal’s Bill Lickiss was elected in 1963 but the Liberals were not in government from 1983 to 1988 and Russ Hinze had resigned five months earlier, in May 1988.

Inside the party, Goss's main task was to make the ALP fit for government. This was not without its problems. Under the surface, many of the old personalities and factional struggles remained. In the party campaign literature, Goss's name was ubiquitous. Despite early concerns that he lacked public appeal, Goss was soon praised for his tough approach. When he spoke in the House about what his government would do when elected, the public gallery erupted in spontaneous applause. He said:

Let us aim for the goal of giving this State a future and good Government. It is time for no confidence to be shown in the Government of this State. It is time for an election. It is time for a real change. It is time to clean up the mess. It is time for the people of this State to say, 'We've had enough. You're out'. A Goss Government will give the people of this State that future. It will work within the Fitzgerald framework. I commit a Goss Government to that future. Today I commit a Goss Government to the implementation of the EARC [Electoral and Administrative Review Commission]. After December—or whenever the Premier has the guts to call an election—the Labor Party will be ready to move and give this State an honest future, not a dishonest one; not a step back into the darkness; not a Government of dishonour and scheming ambition. The Labor Party will provide good government. (*QPD* 1989:vol. 313, p. 621)

This augured well but there was still a gruelling campaign to be fought—under the old electoral boundaries. Winning the Treasury benches was not a foregone conclusion. The ALP had been fortunate to have an influx of new talent in the 1980s, but finding enough shadow ministers of quality, who also met with the approval of the organisational wings of the party, was challenging. Goss wryly noted as much to a senior official when planning his first ministry: 'Remember to leave me with some small, insignificant Departments because I have some small, insignificant Ministers' (cited in Wanna 2003:370). Russell Cooper replaced Ahern just three months out from the election and suddenly the opposition faced a new adversary. This leadership change and the retention of Bill Gunn as Deputy Premier resulted in moments of humour in the House. Ed Casey could not help but jest: 'Mr Speaker...I want it to be known that the vicious rumour circulating throughout Queensland that, when Wayne Goss becomes Premier, this man will bob up as his deputy, is not true' (*QPD* 1989:vol. 313, p. 617).

After 32 years in the wilderness and 11 leadership changes, the Labor Party was elected to government in its own right in December 1989. It had been a long crawl back from the abyss. Successive leaders attempted, but failed, to win a majority of the state-wide vote and the various malapportionment schemes had served to deflate the proportion of seats they might otherwise have won. Labor's high-water mark in terms of voter support was in 1972 (with 46.75 per cent), after which it hovered around the low-40 percentages. Not until 1989 did

Labor achieve a majority of the vote—and then only just (50.32 per cent, but delivering 54 seats). Labor had rebuilt itself and made itself electable to ordinary Queenslanders. About 10 per cent of the electorate voted Labor for the first time in their lives in 1989. It was a huge swing, but it also took the collapse of the Coalition, two terms of the unrestrained National Party governing alone, two decades of Premier Bjelke-Petersen's hubris and vindictiveness and eventually a royal commission of inquiry into police misconduct before Labor was finally able to sell itself as an alternative government and be entrusted again with the governing of the state. Goss and his team of more able shadow spokesmen finally fell over the finishing line as the victors. The new Deputy Premier, Tom Burns, summed up the elation in the Labor camp with the memorable quote: 'I'll have to suck a lemon to get the grin off my face' (*Sunday Mail*, 10 December 1989).

Withholding recognition and resources from the opposition

Throughout its period in opposition, the Labor Party was parsimoniously funded and had little administrative support or other resources. Unlike in other Westminster systems, where the Leader of the Opposition holds an important institutional position, the Queensland parliamentary system embraced a 'winner-take-all' style of government. Jack Houston recalled the limited assistance available during his period as Opposition Leader (1966–74):

The Leader had a private secretary and [one] typist, circumstances which helped bring about the development of Shadow Ministers and their committees. These early committees were within the party and not recognised by the Government. The Shadow Minister and his committee had the responsibility of researching all matters that came under their Shadow Ministry and except in matters of major policy they led the opposition debate in the house and framed questions of concern to their minister. (Personal correspondence, 3 March 1997)

The government's reluctance to provide the opposition with additional resources was driven by the Premier and was seen as payback for the time when the Coalition was in opposition and received few resources. It was straight retribution. Joh Bjelke-Petersen was, according to Bill Hewitt, 'an Old-Testament Christian'—a fire-and-brimstone proponent who believed in an 'eye for an eye'—who thought what was good enough for the Country Party in its wilderness years in opposition was good enough for Labor. As with many self-taught lay preachers, he maintained a belief in simple faiths: there was only one 'right way' and all others were satanic or sinful. Bjelke-Petersen was, thus,

angered by *any* opposition to his government and his antipathy was expressed through denying the opposition recognition or resources to perform credibly. It was as if it was God's duty to deny any opponents sustenance.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the opposition complained that inadequate resourcing prevented it becoming a professional team making an effective contribution in the Parliament and hindered its ability to campaign and travel across the vast state. This lack of resources meant that Labor's capacity to challenge the government rested purely with the leader and a few senior shadow spokespeople. Houston frequently requested additional assistance and he often compared Queensland's poor treatment of its opposition with the more generous resourcing of oppositions in other states. According to Houston, Victoria's Opposition Leader had a political secretary, research officer, personal secretary, two typists and a chauffeur. The NSW opposition was accorded similar treatment. In Queensland, the Opposition Leader had only a secretary, typist and chauffeur, and everyone else had nothing. Houston told the Parliament in October 1969:

I am not looking for additional staff only so that I may say that the Leader of the Opposition has more staff. As you realise, Mr Ramsden [the temporary Chair of Committee], a great deal of work has to be done to make democracy work. There are two essential sections: the Government, on one side, presenting its legislation; the Opposition, on the other, presenting its view of the legislation, whatever it happens to be. The presentation of such cases involves a great deal of time and research, and one cannot do the work today with the same number of staff that one had 10 or 20 years ago. I know it can be said that certain things happened to the then Opposition under Labour Governments. However, I am not interested in what happened then. If it was not in the best interests of the Opposition in those Parliaments, I regret it, but I am interested in what is happening today. (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 742)⁵

The Speaker's letter of reply to Houston's representations indicated he would raise the matter of resources with the Premier personally and, in a separate letter to the Speaker, the Premier stated he would be pleased to discuss such proposals with the Speaker at a mutually convenient time. Nothing changed. Houston was fobbed off with the excuse that the government could not provide more staff because of the limited space in the parliament building (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 742). An incensed Houston responded, stating 'where to put any extra staff is secondary to what I consider more important—that is, the provision of such extra assistance' (*QPD* 1969:vol. 251, p. 742).

5 For more on the institutional importance of the shadow cabinet, see Bateman (2009).

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Premier frequently used his government-funded jet to tour the state at his convenience, while the Opposition Leader, Ed Casey, was forced to use standard-schedule commercial flights. The Liberal leader was also allowed to use the jet for meetings and in the election campaign. As Casey pointed out, his travel arrangements involved ‘very early starts, using up time that I should be working on co-ordination of the campaign’ (*Melbourne Argus*, 29 October 1980). The government paid for just one flight in the 1980s election and Casey’s request that cabinet consider a more generous allowance including unlimited air travel for his deputy was summarily dismissed. The Premier’s response was unequivocal: Casey was getting far better treatment than any previous opposition leader had enjoyed.

Further controversy arose when the opposition was moved out of Parliament House and away from the media. Cabinet decided to relocate the Opposition Leader’s office to Watkins Place in Brisbane’s CBD. Burns queried the decision as to why the opposition had been summarily relocated by cabinet and wondered whether it would ever be allowed back. The reason for the move was due to the renovation, so he asked:

What is the nature of such renovations? For what purpose will the room be used when they are completed; I am talking about the staff office that we now have? Does the Cabinet decision also mean that there will be no provision for accommodation...for Opposition staff in the new parliamentary wing, even though lengthy discussions have been held on this subject and designs still exist within the Minister’s department for accommodation for Opposition staff in the new building? Is the space allocated to my staff in the new building now being given to the Executive Council or to Cabinet for its use? (*QPD* 1978:vol. 275, pp. 1458–9)

His question was given short shrift. The Works Minister, Claude Wharton, replied:

Cabinet has decided that it is appropriate to provide suitable offices for the Leader of the Opposition and his staff in Watkins Place...I sympathise with the Leader of the Opposition, who apparently will have difficulty in getting to and from work. I also sympathise with his staff. This government always thinks of the employees.

Mr R. J. Gibbs: Oh, go away!...

Mr Wharton: No special provision is made in any other Parliament for the Leader of the Opposition and his staff. I point out that the Premier

and the Treasurer have no provision for office staff in this building, nor has any other Minister...The Leader of the Opposition will just have to get used to doing what they do. (*QPD* 1978:vol. 275, pp. 1458–9)

In 1980, Bill D'Arcy, as deputy leader, asserted that the Queensland opposition remained the 'worst off in Australia' (*QPD* 1980:vol. 282, p. 90), while his leader, Ed Casey, suggested his staffers were the 'most disadvantaged public servants in Queensland', especially since the office of the Leader of the Opposition was physically moved away from the Parliament. He complained 'this is the only Opposition under the Westminster system to be so treated' (*QPD* 1980:vol. 282, p. 819). Labor also complained that when Queensland delegations attended constitutional conventions (attended by the Commonwealth and states and territories), whereas other jurisdictions sent equal numbers of government and opposition members, Queensland short-changed the opposition. Of the 12 delegates per jurisdiction, if other states tended to send six government and six opposition representatives, Queensland sent 10 government delegates in 1974 to two from Labor, and in 1978 and 1982 sent nine government delegates to the opposition's three. While the Premier said it was the Queensland Parliament's prerogative to determine the numbers (and he believed they should approximate the party numbers in the Assembly), Labor argued it was a form of 'one-eyed, lop-sided representation' that was due to the 'undemocratic manipulation of a Premier' (*QPD* 1982:vol. 287, pp. 5149–50).

Parliamentary tactics to blunt opposition attacks

Speakers in the Queensland Parliament have often not been impartial advocates of parliamentary democracy. This often resulted in the Speaker taking a tough line on what was allowed during debate and, at times, giving greater leniency to government members. Speakers kept the opposition members on a tight leash, vetting their questions, forewarning ministers of impending attacks and seeking to expedite government business. Speaker Selwyn Muller was not alone in his view that it was the Speaker's job to interpret decisions in the manner the government of which he was a member would wish, he was just the one to articulate it in this frank fashion (*Courier-Mail*, 8 October 1979).

While Speakers such as Bill Lonergan and later Muller tended to rule the Parliament with a government-aligned iron fist, it was Muller's successor, the 'quiet and gentle' John Warner, who bore the brunt of the opposition's later fury. Dissent motions against the Speaker increased in the 1980s as the ALP stressed the links between corruption highlighted daily in the press and the treatment of Parliament by the government. On one such occasion, Gibbs complained:

In a period of three years, Mr Speaker has made two conflicting statements, and only last week, Mr Speaker acted incorrectly and unfairly and has deliberately gone out of his way to protect the Government. I draw to honourable members' attention the fact that before this 1986 session commenced, the Premier himself went on record as saying that he would tell Mr Speaker how to run this Parliament. That was printed in the media...As every day goes by, it is becoming very obvious that the privilege of this Parliament is being abused by the Government and by the Premier...As of late, because of the incompetence of Mr Speaker, this House certainly does not resemble an open Parliament, one where full and fruitful discussion can take place...Is it any wonder that members on this side of the House and members on the Government side of the House—even though they will not admit it in this Chamber—have lost confidence in Mr Speaker? For the sake of all parliamentarians, he should stand down and resign. (*QPD* 1986:vol. 302, pp. 3793–4)

Bjelke-Petersen expected the Speaker of the day to follow his instructions. This placed a heavy burden on the person in the chair and led to a number of public stoushes between the Premier and the Speaker.

The internal procedures of the Parliament did not help the opposition. Parliamentary practice reflected the government's attitude that the Parliament was there to serve its agenda, and the provisions of *Standing Orders* were used to assist the government to the detriment of the opposition. Moreover, these procedures were often open to interpretation and various Speakers interpreted the *Standing Orders* in a way that protected the government or deflected attacks.

The suspension of an opposition member was one such tactic. Table 13.5 shows the instances when members were suspended from the House. These suspensions were usually for seven days, but some were for up to 14 days. Examining these suspensions now, there appears to be a strong correlation between the number of members ordered to leave the parliamentary precinct and the magnitude of the electoral challenge posed by the opposition. When the contest was relatively even and the opposition was in fighting form (the lead-up to the 1972 election), or when the government felt challenged, the numbers of suspended members increased (1969–74). Most suspensions were for refusal to withdraw a comment or interjection considered inappropriate, un-parliamentary or offensive. These comments and interjections were usually directed towards another Member of Parliament. Sometimes Labor members would test the waters and deliberately misbehave to make a point, baiting a Speaker to see how they would react. They often made endless points of order, frequent interjections and allegations of personal impropriety. At times, the Chamber resembled an unruly schoolyard in which name-calling and accusations flew in all directions. On just four

occasions members were asked to leave the Chamber due to inappropriate dress standards—usually no jacket or tie (Hinze, 10 December 1970; D’Arcy, 9 March 1973; Gibbs, 18 March 1982; and Smyth, 19 April 1989).

The government would move a member be suspended and then use its numbers in the vote to ensure the sanction was ratified. Between 1957 and 1989, Russ Hinze was the only member of the government suspended from the House. His suspension was for the remainder of the day after he offended the Speaker (see *QPD* 1974:vol. 265, p. 486). Throughout this period only two government members were asked to ‘withdraw’ (leave for a few hours): Don Lane (Lib.) was asked to withdraw in 1972 and again in 1975, and Lindsay Hartwig (NP and later independent) in 1978.

Table 13.5 Members of Parliament suspended, 1957–89

| Parliament | MP | Party | Date |
|-------------|---|---|--|
| 35th1957–60 | - | - | - |
| 36th1960–63 | Bennett, C. J. | ALP | 21 November 1962 |
| 37th1963–66 | Wallace, G. W. G. Bennett, C. J. | ALP ALP | 4 March 1964 11 March 1965 |
| 38th1966–69 | Bromley, F. P. Tucker, P. J. R. Jones, R. Graham, F. D. Bennett, C. J. Bennett, C. J. | ALP ALP ALP ALP ALP ALP | 6 September 1966 17 April 1968 26 September 1968 3 December 1968 3 December 1968 6 December 1968 |
| 39th1969–72 | Tucker, P. J. R. Hanson, M. Bennett, C. J. Sherrington, D. J. Sherrington, D. J. Davis, B. J. Bennett, C. J. Baldwin, E. A. | ALP ALP ALP ALP ALP ALP ALP ALP | 19 August 1969 2 December 1969 2 December 1969 29 July 1970 25 August 1970 22 October 1970 15 September 1971 8 December 1971 |
| 40th1972–74 | Tucker, P. J. R. Jones, N. F. Bromley, F. P. Moore, F. P. Aikens, T. Tucker, P. R. J. Burns, T. J. Sherrington, D. J. Hinze, R. J. Sherrington, D. J. Tucker, P. R. J. Moore, F. P. Wright, K. W. | ALP ALP ALP ALP NQLP ALP ALP ALP NP ALP ALP ALP ALP | 5 September 1972 26 October 1972 30 March 1973 5 April 1973 5 April 1973 11 September 1973 11 September 1973 7 March 1974 3 September 1974 24 September 1974 23 October 1974 23 October 1974 31 October 1974 |
| 41st1975–77 | Hooper, K. J. | ALP | 11 March 1976 |
| 42nd1978–80 | Hooper, K. J. | ALP | 20 May 1980 |
| 43rd1981–83 | Burns, T. J. | ALP | 2 August 1983 |

| | | | |
|--------------------|------------------|-----|------------------|
| 44th1983–86 | Underwood, D. F. | ALP | 27 March 1984 |
| | McLean, R. T. | ALP | 22 November 1984 |
| | Gibbs, R. J. | ALP | 20 March 1985 |
| | Hamill, D. J. | ALP | 20 March 1985 |
| | Casey, E. D. | ALP | 18 February 1986 |
| | Burns, T. J. | ALP | 19 February 1986 |
| | Gibbs, R. J. | ALP | 26 February 1986 |
| 45th1987–89 | Burns, T. J. | ALP | 15 October 1987 |

Source: Queensland Parliamentary Library, Research Section.

On some occasions, the decision by the Speaker to suspend a member could have been prejudicial to the final vote.⁶ An instance of this was during the bitter debate over the Pregnancy Termination Control Bill, when Kev Hooper was suspended for 14 days. Labor frontbencher Bob Gibbs later stated:

In this House just a few hours ago, because of the frustration and the fear experienced by this Government, we saw one of the most shameful acts we have seen in the last 2½ years, when the honourable member for Archerfield was sent out of the house for 14 days...The Minister knew, as did all Government members know, that the numbers were as close as 37 to 34. It only needs a few more Government members to sway—that possibly could still happen—for this Bill to be defeated. The Government was prepared to stoop to any low political trick to suspend a member of the Opposition who would have opposed this legislation. (QPD 1980:vol. 281, p. 3698)

The opposition's ability to adequately scrutinise the government was constrained in other ways. Throughout most of this period, the *Standing Orders* were out of date and, until the Standing Orders Committee was reconstituted in the 1980s, it had not met for more than 20 years. Many of the formal processes of parliament were antiquated and designed to obfuscate, and transparency and accountability were perfunctory at best. The routine practices found in other parliaments (such as dedicated estimates committees) were resisted or ignored. For instance, before the 1990s, the scrutiny of departmental estimates was a haphazard affair. Some departments did not have their estimates of spending (and therefore their intended activities) debated for many years, while other usually less controversial departments were often debated. The committee (parliament as a whole) could not call on officials and estimates debates were largely indistinguishable from other debates in the House. They certainly were not rigorous inquiries into a department's expenditures. As Ed Casey noted during the 1982 estimates debate of the Lands Department:

⁶ The use of *Standing Orders* to benefit the government in a close house is avoided now with the addition of a *Standing Order* that enables the Speaker to order the withdrawal of a member for the remainder for the day, except for divisions—so while suspended from the House, they are still able to vote.

An extraordinary aspect of recent events in this Parliament is that it is very difficult to obtain a department's annual report until virtually the day prior to the presentation of the Estimates of that department. Unquestionably, a department's annual report is the only appropriate source of information from which members can ascertain what is being done by the Government. (*QPD* 1982:vol. 289, p. 2475)

Labor's frontbench tried various strategies to show up the government's shortcomings and sometimes they backfired. Their cries of censorship were sometimes taken up by the press as the following editorial attested:

The Opposition's complaint that a ridiculous form of censorship is making a farce of question time...has merit. This censorship of questions is only one of the defects of the system of questions and answers in the State Parliament, but is nevertheless of importance...There is no reason why an implied criticism of the Government, or of a Minister, should be removed from a question. (*Courier-Mail*, 11 September 1969)

Even such sympathetic views, however, contained criticisms of how the opposition conducted itself in the House. The same editorial also noted: 'The Opposition has contributed to the poor questioning of Ministers by not making the best use of question time. The time of Parliament should not be wasted in providing answers to repetitive questions, or to questions to which the answers are readily available in parliamentary papers' (*Courier-Mail*, 11 September 1969).

While inadequate resources hampered the opposition's performance, it nevertheless often seemed the Labor Party was itself too complacent. This left the door open to Labor's political opponents, who suggested that the opposition was lazy and that question time was often a wasted exercise, as the only issues raised were those that had been raised in the media the morning before they were then asked in the Parliament. Indeed, Russ Hinze once said that he wondered whether Labor would be able to dream up any questions if the *Courier-Mail* failed to appear on a sitting day (*QPD* 1971:vol. 257, p. 1200).

Outside the Parliament, the ability of the opposition to criticise the government was constrained by the threat of legal action. The Premier and his senior ministers used threats of defamation and stopper writs against critics during Bjelke-Petersen's final terms. Even if no damages were awarded against the defendant, they often had to pay the legal costs of ministers. On the other hand, when the Premier faced civil action for defamation (initiated by the environmentalist John Sinclair), he got cabinet to agree to meet all his costs in defending the case. The opposition considered that the use of defamation lawsuits was evidence that the government had something to hide. The threat of legal action toughened Labor's resolve and some on the frontbench started

interviewing disenchanted public servants to gather information that would further discredit the government. Tom Burns pointed out to the waiting press after he was suspended from the Parliament that 'I have got a ton of time. Joh's given it to me' (*Australian Financial Review*, 15 October 1986, p. 7).

Some of these publicly funded law suits resulted in personal payments to individuals, including the Premier. During 1986, when the Parliament was discussing the payment of \$400 000 to Bjelke-Petersen by Alan Bond as an out-of-court defamation settlement, the Premier responded to questions about who was paying his legal bills by issuing further threats:

Mr Bjelke-Petersen: It will give me great glee and great joy to pay all my expenses when I get the Leader of the Opposition before the court.

Mr De Lacy: Are you going to pay your own costs?

Mr Bjelke-Petersen: Yes. As a consequence of what happened outside the House last night, further action will be taken today by my legal people. Honourable members opposite cannot continue to do these things. They are trying to destroy a Government. By their actions, they are trying to destroy not only me but also the Government...I say to honourable members opposite that, if they again go outside the House and make statements, they will have further troubles and problems on their plate. I assure them that there will be big problems.

Interjection: Is that a threat or a promise? (*QPD* 1986:vol. 303, p. 168)

Bjelke-Petersen went to great lengths to try to prevent his opponents from speaking out against him, his government and his ministers, or against individuals with close ties to the government. He came to resent parliamentary privilege and what he regarded as the abuse of privilege by his political opponents. Outside the Parliament, however, he was not afraid of taking tough initiatives to prevent criticism, using the law as a means of intimidation. His stopper writs and defamation cases were funded at the public's expense, although any windfall gains tended to be accepted personally. Bjelke-Petersen obfuscated on whether he benefited this way and in the Parliament often refused to confirm or deny exactly what had happened to the damages payments. He did confirm that in the case of Mark Plunkett (who had accused the Premier of undertaking a criminal conspiracy to pervert the course of justice), when legal costs were recovered from him (some \$4500), the funds were paid into consolidated revenue (*QPD* 1981:vol. 284, pp. 2025–6).

Conclusion

The ability of successive governments to limit scrutiny of their actions by the opposition was evident throughout most of the previous century. In this regard, the Coalition governments were no different than their Labor predecessors. Neither side took kindly to criticism or scrutiny and resented ever providing the opposition with opportunities or resources with which to attack the government. The opposition was tolerated to the extent that its members made bland or banal speeches on legislation before the House, but not tolerated if it proposed real alternatives or began to criticise government policy or actions. It is not clear from this period of the Parliament's history whether the government ever accepted the legitimacy of the opposition or its right to question the administration of the state. More habitually, the opposition was treated as a whipping post by the government, which was anxious to deflect any disquiet back onto its opponents. It was a trying time for the Labor opposition of this period, but one in which the labour movement as a whole must bear some responsibility for Labor's ineffectiveness as a parliamentary opposition.