

## 14. The demise of the Coalition and the Nationals governing alone, 1981–1983

In 1980, backroom plans had been already entertained for a stand-alone National Party government supplemented by a few Liberal ‘ministerialists’—opportunists who would cross over and side with whatever the next ministry turned out to be in order to remain part of the next government. Historically, ‘ministerialists’ were typically senior parliamentarians who, forgoing party loyalties, decided to collaborate as individuals in the formulation of a new government. After the 1980 election, however, any such musing was put on hold as the two conservative parties lapsed back into coalition. This time, the Nationals clearly imposed their dominance, taking the prime portfolios and consigning the ‘leftovers’ to the Liberals. Labor began to refer to the junior partners as ‘Dr Edwards and his shattered Liberal team’—the losers who were ‘now completely the captive of the National Party’ (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 7).

Despite his vitriolic attacks against the Premier and the National-led government, Llew Edwards retained his position as Deputy Premier and Treasurer—positions he would keep until he was deposed by Terry White on the eve of the Coalition collapse in August 1983, although there was an unsuccessful attempt by dissident Liberals to remove Edwards in November 1981. When the Premier learned about the dissident Liberal plan to topple Edwards, with Angus Innes taking the lead, he declared Innes an ‘anti-coalitionist’ and someone with whom he would not work. Instead, Bjelke-Petersen began hatching plans to form a minority government with whomsoever among the Liberals who would give him support; and then to govern alone until mid-1982. Eventually, the Premier would fall back on this contingency plan but not until a year later, in mid-1983.

The new Parliament contained 12 new members, meaning that more than one-third of the members had served for just one term or less. Only 28 members had been in the House for more than six years. One member, Rob Akers (Lib., Pine Rivers), called it a ‘relatively inexperienced House’, while Labor’s Tom Burns noted that politics was ‘a high-risk industry’ (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, pp. 284–5). The incoming members were Rob Borbidge, Tony FitzGerald, Nev Harper, Doug Jennings, Max Menzel, Geoff Muntz and Jim Randell from the Nationals; Bill (A. G.) Eaton, Ron McLean and Geoff Smith from Labor; and Ian Prentice and Beryce Nelson (the fifth woman to be elected to the House) from the Liberals. All made their maiden speeches in the early months of 1981, pledging their loyalties

to the Queen and raising a few parochial issues of concern to their electorates and local industries. Borbidge talked of tourism, casinos and police shortages; Nelson mentioned aged widows, people with disabilities and the road toll fatalities; and McLean discussed local accommodation problems, crisis centres, local libraries, the need for more ferries and the beauty of the Brisbane River.

At the other end of the spectrum, Bjelke-Petersen turned seventy years of age in January 1981; he had by then sat in the Parliament for almost 34 years—17 as a Minister of the Crown and more than 12 years as Premier. First elected in 1947, he was the last of his generation. In the 1981–83 Parliament, only Bill Knox remained from the 1950s (1957) and only another four from the early 1960s: Vic Sullivan and Claude Wharton (both 1960), Bill Lickiss (1963) and Norman Lee (1964). By 1981, only two ministers besides Bjelke-Petersen were survivors of his first ministry dating from 1968: Knox and Sullivan. The forty-third Parliament (1981–83) would sit for only 130 days during three years—approximately 43 days a year. There would be no by-elections during this Parliament.

## **An exercise in subterfuge: the quest to ‘sell’ Muller as Speaker**

Again, considerable bluster, vitriol and breast-beating were evident in the process of electing a Speaker, when the House was ‘uncontrolled’ (because it was chaired by the Clerk, who had no authority). Lin Powell (NP, Isis) nominated Sel Muller as the Coalition’s preferred choice. There was not much by way of reasoned argument from Powell to support his nomination. He traced a superficial, potted history of the Speaker’s position in Westminster (in which the Speaker’s independence is sacrosanct, unlike in Queensland), before stating that Muller was ‘well suited to fit those demanding terms of reference’. Muller’s qualifications were apparently that he was born in Boonah, left school at fifteen, worked in primary industry, fought in the Middle East in World War II and maintained an active interest in primary industry before entering the Parliament in 1969. Thus, Powell concluded, ‘his career has been long and distinguished’ with his interest in politics supposedly dating back to 1935 when his father, Alf Muller, entered the Parliament. Colin Miller (Lib., Ithaca) immediately sprang to second the nomination, praising the nominee, claiming he ran the House well in the second half of the previous Parliament and had presided over innovations such as the introduction of adjournment debates. He ventured that ‘I will be very surprised if we do not see a meeting of the Standing Orders Committee’—a statement that was greeted with laughter and derision from the opposition. Miller continued:

It is important that the Speaker of this Parliament be independent. Whilst I heard members of the Opposition laugh a few moments ago when I referred to a meeting of the Standing Orders Committee, I hope that they will be serious enough to recognise that we should be endeavouring at all times to ensure the independence of the Speaker of this Parliament. (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 5)

Worthy sentiments, indeed, but the mover and seconder of the motion to elect Muller were not so serious that they were prepared to countenance an independent vote for the Speaker from the floor of the House (that is, one *not* organised by the parties—in effect a conscience vote). The Leader of the Opposition, Ed Casey, revealed he was ‘absolutely shocked and amazed’ that the government could propose to reinstate Muller in the job given that he had expressed the view that the Speaker was ‘elected to apply the wishes of the Government he represents’ and had then, in the preceding Parliament, ruled out many opposition questions (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 6). Bill D’Arcy—who seconded Labor’s nomination of Ray Jones (the Member for Cairns and Labor’s longest-serving member, first elected in 1965)—also pointed out that Muller had said that he believed the Speaker’s responsibility was to interpret ‘decisions in the manner the Government of which he is a member would wish’ (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 8).

Both Casey and D’Arcy complained about the poor state of the Queensland Parliament, with Casey asserting that Queensland was the only parliament in Australia in which the opposition was denied equal rights in question time, denied equal rights on matters of public importance and denied the right to initiate matters in the House. He claimed that the only way to reverse this was not to trust Liberal reformers who talked about reforms but never delivered, but to appoint a truly independent Speaker.

Kevin Hooper (Archerfield) reminded the House that Dr Norman Scott-Young (Lib., Townsville) had put himself forward to be Speaker and had sent letters around to fellow members seeking support. The letter apparently contained Scott-Young’s observations that

for some years I have been disturbed that the power of Parliament has been slowly eroded...[including by legislation, and in recent years it] lost its independence and became virtually a sub-department of the Premier’s department...Another reason why I intend to nominate for Speaker is that I consider the Speaker should be elected by the Members of Parliament from the floor of the House. It should not be an appointment arranged by and subject to Party Executive directions...If appointed I intend to act in a completely impartial manner in all matters brought up for deliberation. (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 10)

The 'young turk', Norm Scott-Young, did not, however, have the courage or backbench support to mount a challenge and stand. Rosemary Kyburz (Lib., Salisbury) then spoke favourably to the motion to appoint Muller to the Speakership by claiming the Coalition agreement stated that the Speaker was to come from the National Party. She continued: 'I must say that whilst there is not a great deal of the coalition agreement that I agree with, I am prepared to abide by that [clause]', but added that the Parliament was a 'shemozzle' and needed a proper 'committee system' and a 'new Act of Parliament to govern the functioning of this Parliament entirely'. According to Kyburz, responsibility for the House was divided and

torn between two departments. I believe that those who have been here for some years know that it is torn between the Works Department and the Premier's Department. The internal politics of this place are somewhat mystifying, I must say. I feel very sorry about the singularly low morale of some of the employees of this House. (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 12)

She said she 'had a great deal of pleasure in supporting' Muller's nomination because he had 'maintained a high standard of decorum in his role as Speaker' and he was a 'gentleman' who was 'amenable to change' (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 13).

Lindsay Hartwig—who had been elected as a National for the seat of Callide until he was expelled by his party colleagues four months after the election and declared himself an independent on 26 March 1981—also apparently harboured ambitions to become Speaker and had allowed his name to go forward (meaning that he lobbied hard to get support). The newly independent member told the Assembly, however, that

I rise as one who has had the finger pointed at him today, and as one who has levelled some criticism in past weeks about the compilation of Cabinet and how it affects Central and Northern Queensland. My name has also been associated with the speakership. Reference was made this morning by the Premier to the fact that he considered it a joke...I tell the Premier and this Parliament that it was no joke; that I was approached to stand for the speakership. On being approached to nominate for the speakership I considered the matter. I believe that the people who approached me did not do so lightly. I had a conversation with Mr Muller yesterday and told him my attitude to that position. As I see it, it is no joke to have the guts to stand up and point out what I believe is wrong, and to say that I was approached to stand as Speaker.

For too long people in other places have considered that members of Parliament who are constructive in what they say are activated by sour grapes. (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, pp. 14–15)

Hartwig, however, did not stand and completed his speech with ‘we look to Mr Muller to continue to do a good job as Speaker’. The conservative mavericks were toeing the line.

After more than two hours of assertive banter from many participating members, the vote was taken, with Muller receiving 49 votes to Jones on 21, and with 11 members abstaining or voting informally. The vote indicated that up to eight of the Coalition members abstained rather than voting for their candidate. After the conclusion of the vote, the Speaker was congratulated, the full ministry was declared, the opposition officials were listed (but still no full acknowledgment was made of the shadow ministry) and the death of Vince Gair was acknowledged (five years after he last held public office as Ambassador to Ireland and the Holy See).<sup>1</sup>

Under the new regime, question time could last no longer than one hour, questions without and with notice were allowed but no more than three questions in total were allowed per member. While Casey complained about the restrictions, Angus Innes (Lib., Sherwood) spoke against him but urged that ‘the Speaker’s undertaking to call the Standing Orders Committee together should happen soon’ (*QPD* 1981:vol. 282, p. 43). Other members made mention of the Speaker’s intention to revise the *Standing Orders* as a matter of urgency. The Opposition Leader later that day complained about passing ‘sessional orders’ anew each session that had the effect of limiting debates, rather than fully revising the *Standing Orders* properly. He claimed:

Although Sessional Orders identical with this one have been placed on the Business Paper for a considerable number of years, they have never been debated by Parliament and have never been discussed in any way...Instead of having a meeting of the Standing Orders Committee, we simply pass, year after year, a Sessional Order that is seemingly to play some part in the operations of this Assembly. However, a close analysis of the proposed Sessional Order shows clearly that it is intended to restrict the activities of the Parliament. It is one of those procedures that has made the Queensland Parliament the laughing-stock of all other Parliaments in Australia. It confines discussion to only those matters that the Government brings forward...What we are seeking to do is to give

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<sup>1</sup> Labor’s five officials were: Ed Casey, Leader of the Opposition; Bill D’Arcy, Deputy Leader; Bill Prest, Opposition Leader of Business; Brendan Hansen, Whip; and Les Yewdale, Secretary.

back to the back-benchers in this Parliament the rights they enjoyed from 1859 until 1966 when they were denied them by procedure and, since 1971, by Sessional Order. (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, pp. 131–3)

By ‘rights’, the Labor spokesman meant that he wanted backbench members to be allowed to introduce private member’s bills and have them debated. To which the Primary Industries Minister, Mike Ahern, responded by interjecting that the Labor leadership group ‘did not understand what a private member’s Bill was about’ (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 134). Tom Burns then reminded Ahern that he had spoken ‘for years about parliamentary reform’, but then added: ‘He sold his soul to Joh in order to get into the ministry. He has forgotten about parliamentary reform from the day he left the backbenches’ (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 134). A Standing Orders Committee was appointed and announced by the Leader of the House, Claude Wharton, with the membership including himself, Joh Bjelke-Petersen, Ed Casey, Colin Miller, Bill D’Arcy, Llew Edwards and Bill Prest.

In desperation, Casey even offered to form an alternative government consisting of Labor and dissident Liberals. He told the House:

It is my intention to publicly reveal for the first time the details of that offer. We indicated that we were prepared to enter into discussions with the Liberal Party with a view to forming a minority Government to be formed by either party. Such agreement would include the introduction of electoral legislation to bring down a redistribution based on a one vote–one value principle. It would also include the election of a Speaker and a Chairman of Committees; the retention by whichever of the two parties supported the Government in office of all existing entitlements, with more just staff arrangements; and agreement on a legislative program and a firm commitment to regular consultation. (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, pp. 98–9)

According to Casey, this minority government agreement would be kept in place only long enough to make the arrangements and then hold a fresh election on the new boundaries.

## **Conflicts of interest: the triumph of the ‘brumbies’**

In the first question time, Casey asked the Premier why he had appointed Russ Hinze (fast becoming the ‘Minister for Everything’) as minister responsible for the racing industry, having removed it from Dr Edwards’ portfolio. Casey

continued: ‘how does he justify his choice of the member for South Coast as both Police and Racing Minister when he owns one of the largest racing stables in the State and must inevitably initiate decisions from which he will benefit personally?’ In response, Bjelke-Petersen claimed ‘members on this side... are involved in various forms of business activity and interest. When any of those activities are under discussion or review, the person concerned makes a statement or declaration in relation to his interest.’ He claimed that the same provision applied to cabinet, but that ‘no set rule concerning the activities of members of Parliament’ existed (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 54). At the same time, Llew Edwards attempted to introduce a code of ethics for ministers based on the model introduced in the United Kingdom by Margaret Thatcher, but was unsuccessful, with the Premier claiming that ‘no code written or otherwise, can make any man honest if he has not lived that way all his life’ (*AJPH* 1981:vol. 27, no. 3, p. 390).

The Parliament was also informed that the National Party Senator Glen Sheil had resigned his position as of 6 February 1981 to contest a lower house seat.<sup>2</sup> The State Parliament was asked to approve the nomination of Mrs Flo Bjelke-Petersen as his replacement. Casey greeted news of this proposal with some not-unexpected caustic comments. He made a link to the extra superannuation she would receive if appointed to take up the Senate place before her (elected) term began via the casual vacancy route. Casey said:

On Thursday, the implacable opponent of parliamentary superannuation in 1948 [the Premier] will ask this Parliament to send Mrs Bjelke-Petersen early to Canberra to allow her to collect at least \$150,100 superannuation after only six years and one election. The personal deep hatred of superannuation has suddenly disappeared when personal gain is involved. (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 99)

While the Opposition Leader reflected on ‘how times have changed’, the Liberal Dr Scott-Young suggested that Bjelke-Petersen did not understand superannuation or the benefits it would bring back in 1948.

The notice of a senate vacancy was tabled on 12 March; it was the first such vacancy to occur in Queensland under the new constitutional amendment (the revised Section 15 on casual vacancies) passed to prevent such abuses as had occurred when the conservative governments in both New South Wales (under Premier Tom Lewis) and Queensland (under Bjelke-Petersen) had broken

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<sup>2</sup> After not being re-elected at the 1980s election, Sheil was encouraged to run for a federal lower house seat by the Premier. He got his chance sooner than he might have expected when the Federal Member for McPherson, Eric Robinson, died in January 1981. Sheil ran as an endorsed National in the by-election, but lost to the Liberal candidate, Peter White. Later he made a successful bid to re-enter the Senate in the double dissolution of 1984 and remained in the upper chamber until 1990.

convention in 1975 by appointing senators who did not enjoy the approval of the party they supposedly represented. The Speaker called for nominations for the vacancy. The Premier immediately rose to nominate his wife, saying 'I nominate Florence Isabel Bjelke-Petersen, housewife, of "Bethany", Kingaroy, for election to hold the place in the Senate rendered vacant through the resignation of Senator Glen Sheil' (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 226). The Premier's justification was that

[s]he has become a senator-elect in a completely orthodox way. She was properly nominated for consideration by the National Party...[and] the central council selected her as one of three for the National Party's Senate ticket, and during the party's annual conference she was elected, again by the central council, to the number one position...Florence was elected last October by the people of Queensland to take a position in the Senate as a National Party Senator from 1 July 1981. (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 227)

He neglected to mention that Flo was shoehorned in over sitting Senators Glen Sheil and Ron Maunsell largely at his own behest, and causing some resentment among the party faithful. He also did not disclose, as Lindsay Hartwig did, that when Flo won endorsement at the party's state conference, only two sitting National MPs had seen fit to support her (himself and the Premier perhaps?). The Premier responded to criticism that his family was milking the superannuation system by saying 'it is not Florence who is to blame in relation to this question of superannuation. It is the system that has been set up by Canberra, rushed through in the House of Representatives by John Howard in 11 minutes' (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 227).

Never one to let a free fight pass by without comment, Ed Casey chimed in:

This Parliament has witnessed some amazing scenes but perhaps none more amazing than those associated in recent years with Senate replacements. None had greater ramifications than those which occurred in this Parliament on 27 August 1975 and again a week later on 3 September 1975 in what subsequently became known as the Field Affair. On that occasion the Premier, who is still the incumbent in that office, led his cohorts in the National Party and slaves in the Liberal Party into a situation...of complete defiance of the intent of the Australian Constitution and the accepted practice throughout Australia in relation to Senate replacements. (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, pp. 227–8)

Casey accused the Premier of 'impatient husband-and-wife greed' (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, pp. 227–8). Although Labor did not oppose the nomination, they objected to Bjelke-Petersen giving three names, as though the Parliament

was being asked to decide between a panel of three for the job (as the Premier had insisted Labor ought to do in 1975). He insisted that the spirit of the constitutional amendment was that 'a casual Senate vacancy in a State should be filled not only by a nominee of the same political party but by the proper choice of that political party' (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 229). His view was that the National Party executive had not formally chosen Flo and the Premier was now trying to bypass that stage and use his numbers in the Parliament to nominate his wife, even though she was a senator-elect and had headed the Nationals' ticket. Despite Casey's consternation, the constitutional amendment to Section 15 did not state that the party had to formally choose the candidate, only that the nominee had to be a member of the same party and be recognised as such (that is, the party could veto or debar any candidate it did not endorse). As government members kept interjecting, Casey then added, swatting back at persistent interjections from the new Transport Minister, Don Lane, 'they can put a ministerial saddle on them, Mr Speaker, but they are still the same old brumbies'.

After one and a half hours of unedifying debate, much of which from Labor's side was spurious, Flo Bjelke-Petersen was elected on the voices (that is, no vote was required).

## **A farrago of doubts over mining leases**

Foreign ownership of Queensland mines continued to generate political heat for the government. According to the opposition, the government was acquiring a reputation for being merely a rubber-stamp government in relation to mining lease approvals, suggesting close links between business and the government. During the early 1980s, the fiasco of the Winchester South leases emerged not only as a controversial decision, but as suggestive of favouritism and kickbacks.

When the Winchester South deposits (near Moranbah in the Bowen Basin) were discovered, the state government decided to auction off the rights to the mining leases. The government prepared a competitive tender process for a licence to prospect and then mine steaming coal said to be worth at least \$2 billion. The process was, however, anything but rigorous. In all, 32 tenders were received from interested concerns—a record for an Australian coal lease. The Director-General of the Mines Department, Jack Woods, supposedly undertook an evaluation of each tender but the evaluation mysteriously went missing and no record of it could be found in the Mines Department or in cabinet records. There was some suggestion that, even after these extensive tenders had been received, the process was short-circuited by the Premier and the Mines Minister, Ivan Gibbs.

Cabinet was faced with a *fait accompli*, which, according to one source, led to ‘cries of disbelief’, particularly because the decision was taken before the tenders had been fully evaluated, especially by Treasury, which was bypassed in the process (Stuart 1985:65). Treasury had been hoping to acquire a good deal for the mining lease but by all accounts the amount the successful tender promised was considerably less than other tenders had offered the state government (*AJPH* 1981:vol. 27, no. 3, p. 391). The cabinet submission of 9 March 1981, under Gibbs’ name, advocated the case for one consortium over all the others and recommended this consortium be given a three-year ‘accelerated’ exploration licence to assess the site and begin production. The full submission was leaked to the press and the opposition and tabled in the Parliament. There was some speculation that the submission had been leaked by a disgruntled minister, possibly the Treasurer or his department, who did not approve of the decision.

The ‘winner’ of the coal auction was the consortium of BP Australia (50 per cent), Drayton Mining (25 per cent) and Westfield Holdings (25 per cent). Drayton Mining was owned by Sir Leslie Thiess, a personal friend of the Premier, and a former owner of the mining company Thiess Holdings, which had been acquired by CSR Limited. Frank Lowy, who was already starting to acquire a shopping centre empire in Queensland, owned Westfield. The *Australian Financial Review* (1 April 1981) suggested that the close personal relationship between the Premier and Sir Leslie Thiess was not unrelated to the outcome of the tender. Thiess was apparently anxious to get back into the coal industry with its then mega-profits after his earlier company had been taken over by CSR in a hostile action, which he had strenuously opposed. According to Gibbs, the BP/Drayton/Westfield deal promised the government additional royalties but over the longer term (for example, an extra \$1 per tonne but only starting in 1985, rising to \$4 per tonne by 2005). Later in the Parliament, Labor accused Jack Woods of taking his holidays at Thiess’s beach house with members of the Thiess family at the same time as the tenders were closing (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 680). More than a decade later, Thiess was considered by a jury to have bribed the Premier ‘on many occasions’ in order to secure government contracts, including the Winchester South lease, and to build a host of other public facilities (prisons, cultural centres and Expo 88) (see Tiffen 1999:214–15; Stuart 1985:65).

Labor was torn between arguing that the coal companies were engaged in the ‘raping of Queensland’s assets’ and complaining that the additional royalties meant that previous deals with mining companies were too low and, therefore, ‘selling Queensland’s rich mineral assets too cheaply’ (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 166). They also lamented that such deals were dominated by foreign interests and excluded ordinary Queensland investors. They also accused Sir Edward

Lyons of being the mysterious middleman who had secured the deal (an accusation rejected by the minister). Bill D'Arcy was well armed in his attacks on the government because he possessed a complete cabinet proposal (in the name of the minister) and the decision. In a 40-minute address, D'Arcy accused the government of making ad hoc and stopgap decisions to favour mates. He commented that 'it is an insult to the tenderers, some of whom reportedly spent up to \$500,000 on preparing their tenders, merely to be listed in a table' (in the body of the submission). He added it was 'gross incompetence of the highest order' that the project was 'not economically evaluated by the Treasury and the Co-ordinator-General's department'. He asked the minister if it were true that the bid by the BP/Thiess/Lowy consortium was the best, 'why did Cabinet immediately set about renegotiating the tender', and suggested that if one tenderer could improve their offer why were others not also allowed to improve their offers (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, pp. 416–19)? He pointedly said:

How can the Minister claim that he knew best? He was away for quite a considerable time during the evaluation period. The tenders were quite detailed and complex in nature. I doubt that he would have had time to consider the tenders—because Einstein, he ain't...I have tabled the Cabinet documents referring to Winchester South so that future generations of Australians, Queenslanders and parliamentarians will be able to judge for themselves the naïve way in which resources worth \$1,600 m were handled by the Minister for Mines and Energy. (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, pp. 416–19)

Questions continued about the Winchester South deal, especially about why other offers were not considered. In response to such publicity, the government passed the *State Development and Public Works Organization Act Amendment Act 1981*, which allowed the government to declare any development project a 'prescribed development' or 'declared industry' meaning any development agreements did not need to come before the Parliament and any necessary approvals could be decided in secret by the Executive Council. The act also allowed for state government assistance to the local authorities in the provision of infrastructure when declared industries came into the local authority's area. On the whole, however, the act provided a way of minimising the scrutiny of the Parliament to examine development applications.

## **Parliament 'not equipped to discharge its obligations'**

The Parliament sat for 61 days in 1981 and passed 130 bills; it was one of its busiest years of the period. Most legislation in the new Parliament was

amendment legislation, often of a mundane or minor nature.<sup>3</sup> It seemed hard for some members to maintain an interest in the matters at hand. Even on important pieces of legislation such as the Clean Air Act Amendment Bill 1981, the Minister, Bill Hewitt, could rise to say at the second reading stage that ‘in the absence of anyone else wanting to speak’ after only nine members had commented on the amendments (*QPD* 1981:vol. 284, p. 2032).

Occasionally, ministers introduced legislation pretending the changes were minor, when in fact they were more substantial—a form of subterfuge. Ministers labelled their proposed amendments ‘machinery measures’ hoping to get them through without attracting attention. Labor members, however, were often awake to such ploys. The vigilant Kev Hooper claimed that he was loath to trust ministers when they said changes were ‘mechanical’ and Terry Mackenroth reflected:

About 18 months or two years ago the Minister brought before us amendments to the State Housing Act and told us that they, too, were machinery measures. Of course, after the Bill was passed and became law, we found that it enabled the Housing Commission to sell land at Redbank Plains. That aspect was not mentioned in the debate, nor were honourable members told that the real purpose of those amendments to the Act was to allow that to occur. (*QPD* 1981:vol. 284, p. 1699)

Even the *Petroleum Act Amendment Act* was regarded as a ‘machinery measure designed to correct a number of anomalies’ (Ken Vaughan, ALP, Nudgee, in *QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 462). This was despite suggestions that seismic testing and drilling in the Gulf of Carpentaria might be a ‘practice run for drilling on the Great Barrier Reef’, even though the government had indicated by this stage that it had ruled out any such drilling on the reef—a point reconfirmed by the Mines Minister, Ivan Gibbs, in the debate.

Members sometimes asked why particular pieces of legislation were *not* being introduced—usually when some perceived need had been identified and the government was procrastinating. For example, a number of ministers were asked why they would not introduce compulsory seatbelts for cars to improve safety, to which one government minister replied that it was entirely an issue for the Main Roads Minister, Russ Hinze. The laws relating to drink-driving were successively tightened—a feature that did not always please the more populist honourable members in the Chamber. Rosemary Kyburz asked in November 1981 ‘isn’t it funny how some members get “thingy” when random breath-testing is discussed’, to which Bob Moore (Lib., Windsor) said, ‘I am

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3 The *Evidence and Oaths Acts Amendments*, *Exotic Diseases in Animals*, *Canned Fruits Marketing* and *Dairy Products Stabilisation Acts*; even the Hen Quotas Act Amendment Bill (which was, according to one member, ‘well intentioned but furry around the edges’) and so on.

one of them' (*QPD* 1981:vol. 286, p. 4018). If some ministers attempted to take a responsible attitude, others played to the gallery, such as Alex Wilson (ALP, Townsville South), who thought that decreasing the legal drink-driving limit to 0.05 was a revenue raiser that would have the effect of driving people out of pubs to drink at home (*QPD* 1982:vol. 288, p. 1283); and Kev Hooper, who noted that 'one bottle of beer will put the average drinker above the limit. Some government members would spill more than that' (*QPD* 1982:vol. 288, p. 1355). Peter McKechnie (NP, Carnarvon) took a brave stand, arguing that because almost half of all drivers killed on Queensland roads had a blood alcohol reading of greater than 0.08, the government should become tougher on such abusers of the road rules and the police should make more arrests instead of 'manning radar traps' (*QPD* 1981:vol. 285, p. 2409).

Occasionally, members could be reflexive about the institution of which they were part. Rob Akers seriously thought that there was a risk of all parliamentarians being 'eliminated in one fell swoop' if the swimming pool on level seven fell through to the temporary chamber on level five during a division bell or if a fire started on level three below (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 350). He noted with a dry sense of humour that this 'might please many people in Queensland'. This issue was raised as a matter of public interest! Bob Moore reflected:

Most honourable members come into this Chamber by mistake or accident...They do not go to kindergarten, primary school, secondary school and university with the aim of getting into Parliament. Thank God for that! One would not wish to see a parliament full of academics. What I am endeavouring to point out is that very few of us come into this place with a background knowledge of Parliament and of the traditions that should be maintained. (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 384)

This was an observation he could well have been able to make then, when politics was usually someone's second career. They had entered politics usually because of their achievements in other spheres of life. Within a few years, however, the Parliament would be dominated by younger, tertiary-trained professional politicians who had set out from early ages precisely to get into the Parliament—and there was no mistake or accident about these careerists getting into the Parliament. He continued:

My next topic concerning this Parliament is to some extent a criticism of the Westminster system. We have a system of Executive Government wherein back-bench members virtually have no say in legislation, as it has been decided by Cabinet. There is something wrong with that...If the Government is worth its salt, it should adopt any good suggestion made or good amendment moved by any member on either side of the Chamber. If Parliament is to work properly, worthwhile suggestions

should be adopted. Some Cabinet Ministers are being run by their departmental heads. Cabinet does not really carry out its proper function when even Government members have no say in the initial stages of legislation. (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 384)

His views were echoed by Guelfi Scassola (Lib., Mount Gravatt), who ventured:

Parliament in Queensland is not equipped to discharge its obligations to the electorate. It has not the tools to examine Government decisions. It can be likened to a carpenter who is asked to build a house without any tools...if one looks at the presentation of financial information to Parliament, one finds that that information is very meagre, given the size of government and the complexities of modern-day administration. Parliament is asked to make decisions on totally inadequate information when appropriating tens of millions of dollars of expenditure for government. (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 540)

He added that estimates debates often degenerated into 'Cook's tours of electorates' because members could not find sufficient information to make serious contributions.

In a rambling Address-in-Reply speech, Rosemary Kyburz (Lib., Salisbury), who also engaged in a bit of flirtatious banter with the inveterate interjector Kev Hooper (ALP, Archerfield), spoke expansively of the political situation in Pakistan and the seizure of power by the junta led by Zia ul-Haq. She said the junta 'is doing nothing other than suppress democracy and gaoil its critics' and added that 'the fanaticism with which the critics of government are gaoiled is really horrifying', before concluding 'at least in Australia, and at least still, in Queensland, we can publicly criticise'. This comment was greeted by Hooper interjecting 'Joh is working on it', to which Kyburz responded: 'I worry about that at times' (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 552). It was a testing time for critics, as she admitted.

## **More skulduggery and 'scurrilous allegations'**

Lindsay Hartwig, who had recently been expelled from the National Party for repeatedly criticising the president of the party, Sir Robert Sparkes, made allegations of political skulduggery in 1981. He was expelled on 23 March 1981 by the party's executive by a vote of 33–2, but he continued to drop bombshells in the media and in the Parliament. The next time he spoke in the Parliament (a week later, on 31 March), he accused the Premier of plotting with the Labor Party to eliminate Liberals before the 1980 election. His premise for making the

allegations in the Chamber was that the Premier had denied them when they first appeared in the press, so he claimed he wanted to set the record straight. Hartwig stated:

It was an August evening just prior to my overseas trip to Zambia. I was sitting in the [parliamentary] dining-room—I can show honourable members the table—when the member for Archerfield walked in. I was the only member in the dining-room at that time and the honourable member made to go to the area in which the Labor Party usually sits. I said, ‘Kevin, come over here and sit with me. There are two of us here; let’s talk, even though we are on opposite sides of the fence’. Within a few minutes we were joined by the Premier. I am prepared to go on any lie-detecting machine that anybody can bring forward and I am prepared to swear an oath on the Bible that in the ensuing minutes the Premier and the member for Archerfield (Mr Kevin Hooper) discussed ways and means of defeating Liberal Party members at the coming election. Independent Labor members were mentioned. I heard the Premier say, ‘Kevin, we have to seek ways and means of defeating these Liberals’. I don’t tell lies, but I kept that a secret. As a matter of fact, I went outside and had a good vomit. (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 587)

After an interjection, Hartwig continued:

It sickens me to find the same man—the leader who had stood up in the Whitlam era and said, ‘I am anti-Communist. I am anti-socialist’—conniving with the ALP to bring about the demise of his Liberal colleagues...I do not care two hoots whether there was a deal struck. The fact remains that I did not discuss this with the member for Archerfield (Mr Kevin Hooper). I did not even name him in [the] ‘Sunday Sun’. I did not know that he was going to say that this took place. However, it was on my conscience that the day I was expelled from the National Party I said, ‘You will rue the day’. I was referring to the party leaders. The statement was attributed to me that I would destroy the party. One word was left out: I would destroy the party leaders. There are a hell of a lot of good Queenslanders involved in the National Party. I did not say I would destroy the party. However, I make no secret of the fact—I have gone on record saying it—that now Premier Joh’s job is on the line and there is a new Premier on the horizon...I assure the House also that when I am finished with Sir Robert Sparkes he will disappear from the State leadership of the National Party. (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 587)

He also repeated that during the Bjelke-Petersen Foundation appeal, he had ‘received a telephone call asking me to contribute a five-figure amount and to head the list for Central Queensland’. He explained:

I want to say that that person did not say it would get me into Cabinet. That is something that I considered only later. I point blank refused. Here again, I will swear on oath that I was requested to put in \$10,000 to the Bjelke-Petersen Foundation to head the Central Queensland list. (QPD 1981:vol. 283, p. 587)

There was some talk of National Party MPs being required to make contributions or have their preselection threatened. Hartwig also recalled that when the abortion bill was being debated,

Bob Sparkes rang me at least three times about that issue. He asked me to do my utmost to get National Party members, including me, to condemn the Bill, cross the floor and vote against it, and so have it defeated...In fact, that sort of action [intimidating a member] carries a gaol sentence. I might add that I am seeking legal advice on those matters. (QPD 1981:vol. 283, p. 589)

Then for good measure, he continued his tirade:

I was one of the few members of the National Party at the time who advocated that Flo Petersen go to Canberra. I assure members that I have since been reliably informed that Joh and Florence knew that if Florence could get to Canberra before the end of June she would be eligible for an extra \$140,000 or \$150,000 in superannuation. But they conned Sheil into standing for McPherson. Sparkes came out and said that he did not have a hope in hell of winning the seat, but they put him up, got him beaten and then put Florence in. I leave it to the people of Queensland to judge whether that was right or wrong. (QPD 1981:vol. 283, p. 589)

Amid all the allegations of deceitfulness, both Jim Fouras and Keith Wright quipped that Queensland had ‘the best Government that money can buy’ (QPD 1981:vol. 283, p. 592).

When the Premier heard Keith Wright assert that some business leaders knew they could buy favours from the government, he took offence and rushed back into the Chamber to require Wright to withdraw the remark. He asked the Deputy Speaker, Rob Akers, to make the Labor member ‘withdraw that statement immediately, and I will let him off by not having to apologise on this occasion’ (QPD 1981:vol. 283, p. 593). The Deputy Speaker ruled that there was no point of order because Wright did not mention any other member by name—at which point a furious Premier rose to insist that the allegations were untrue and that Akers should make him withdraw the remark. The Deputy Speaker responded by restating that there was no provision in *Standing Orders* under which he could require the member to withdraw the remark. Not accustomed to being overruled, Bjelke-Petersen replied:

They are offensive to me, and for that reason they must be withdrawn. He has brought the Bjelke-Petersen Foundation into the debate.

*Mr Deputy Speaker:* Order! The honourable member has not referred to the Premier by name, and there is no provision in the Standing Orders under which I can ask him to withdraw those comments.

*Mr Wright:* I can understand that the Premier takes exception to what I am saying, because it is very serious.

*Mr Bjelke-Petersen:* It is not true...Mr Deputy Speaker, how long are you going to allow a member to make statements, quoting somebody outside Parliament, that are completely untrue? (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 593)

Akers continued to stand up to the Premier, saying that while government members could defend the government later in the debate, the Labor member had a perfect right to make such statements providing he did not impugn another member directly. After more allegations were made against Russ Hinze, Akers again refused to allow a point of order from the minister. The dispute continued into Doug Jennings' maiden speech, which (contrary to convention) was peppered with interjections from Labor. Jennings complained about the 'scurrilous allegations' that had been made and attacked the Labor members for making 'unfortunate' and 'insulting' references. He continued: 'Opposition members here make allegations about bribery and corruption. They make allegations without one shred of evidence. That is absolutely shameful. They are showing the public what they really are. What I am saying is that Opposition members will have to bring some evidence forward' (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 601).

Labor's campaign of discrediting the government by alleging bribery and corruption and highlighting its close connections with developers was gaining momentum. This was the era when police ministers such as Hinze were publicly denying that illegal casinos and brothels were operating in Fortitude Valley. The next day (April Fool's Day), Bjelke-Petersen was forced to defend his foundation, claiming the allegations were 'nothing more than vicious, baseless innuendo'. He also challenged the interpretation of the Deputy Speaker, claiming he should have called the Labor member to order and warned him 'his imputations of improper motives on the part of my Government were highly disorderly' (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 676). Immediately after this rebuke from the Premier, Akers was forced to make a personal explanation, insisting that he stood by his ruling of the previous day and asking the Speaker, Sel Muller, to stand by those rulings he gave as Deputy Speaker or 'dismiss me from that position' (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 677). Muller did neither but did point out after much argy-bargy that any member (including the Premier) could 'move a motion of dissent

from the Chairman's ruling, and it must be debated at the time' (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 678). As this had not occurred, Muller declared the continuation of the discussion a pointless debate and closed the subject.

Behind the scenes the government turned up the heat on Akers, who admitted he was 'in enough trouble already' (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 695) when goaded by Labor to speak out on issues against the government. His wife, Rosemary Kyburz, came to his defence, protesting about the Premier's intentions to undermine the powers of the Parliament while seeking to 'protect a knight of the realm' from allegations made under privilege. She quoted from a media release from the Premier that stated that the government was 'considering steps to provide redress for members of the public attacked by politicians under Parliamentary privilege' and pointing out that the Premier had sought advice from the Crown Law Office. He was also considering legislating to compel the media, which ran any allegation, to run a person's rebuttal as part of the story. She described the moves, not as providing the public with a right of reply, but merely trying to protect his business mates about whom allegations were continually being made. She continued:

I do not believe that it is a very fair way of running this Assembly to allow people outside who happen to hold high positions in the community to whisper in the Premier's ear and demand protective legislation...As I said, what incensed me particularly was that the Premier made a public statement in order to protect a particular person. The utter hypocrisy of the Premier's statement was made obvious this morning when he chose to attack another member and to question the privilege that he usurped yesterday. (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 689)

Bringing some climax to the various allegations of impropriety, the opposition moved a motion of censure against the government (under an adjournment motion). Five speakers prosecuted Labor's case—Ed Casey, Tom Burns, Ray Jones, Ron McLean and Brendan Hansen—while Val Bird and Joh Bjelke-Petersen defended the government. The tactic backfired on Labor. In the original motion Labor had indicated five matters of concern when, as the Speaker pointed out, under *Standing Orders* it was allowed to debate only one matter in a censure motion, and the Speaker selected the Port of Brisbane Authority's operations. The attack, thus, fell a little flat, and the vote was lost on party lines 23 ayes to 44 noes (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 745).

## Light relief: outward-opening or revolving toilet doors

In one of the more infamous but absurd moments in the Queensland Parliament, Vince Lester presented what he regarded a most 'serious matter': the opening of toilet doors. Admitting that he had forwarded a submission to the Local Government Department advocating outward-opening or sliding doors, he noted the department had issued directives that toilet doors be made more accessible in public buildings. He welcomed the fact that disabled and paraplegic people would soon be able to access toilets more conveniently. He had long advocated that toilet doors should open outwards or even open upwards to facilitate entry and exit or if need be provide access to a carer. He claimed that 150 people died each year locked in toilets (although he did not source his claim) and added 'I'll bet there is no member of this Parliament who does not know someone who has not suffered a problem with a toilet door' (*QPD* 1981:vol. 283, p. 997).

Some of the other members expressed a little mirth indicating they did not share his passion, yet for a full 10 minutes Lester treated the Parliament to a homily on toilet doors! There was even some discussion about whether toilet doors could, indeed, slide around and revolve or whether outwards opening was more practical. Lester appeared unperturbed by the fact others did not see the gravity of his case. At one stage he advocated outward-opening doors for the Parliament, appearing on television to further his campaign. He would forever be known as the 'Member for Toilet Doors that Open Outwards'. His other nickname was the 'Member for Walking Backwards' because he had walked backwards to raise money for charity.

## Where to draw the line on developments and interventions

In the late 1970s and 1980s, it became increasingly clear that the government did not know where to draw the line when it came to promoting development. The government had tried strenuously to extract oil from the Rundle Shale oil deposits. It had long harboured ambitions to drill the Great Barrier Reef for oil. It had attempted to mine sand from Fraser Island but was prevented by the federal government, which denied an export licence. It then tried to sponsor sandmining on Moreton Island, with the Premier claiming that after sandmining the island would 'be rehabilitated in such a way that we won't recognise it'—to which the Opposition chimed in 'nobody will recognise it' (*QPD* 1981:vol. 284, p. 1406; vol. 283, p. 384; vol. 283, p. 384). There were other

schemes involving islands, which the government appeared to condone that were effectively fraudulent, such as the attempts to sell land that flooded at high tide on Russell Island.

This development-led government was not, however, averse to interfering with the market. During the 1980s, many Queensland businesses started to become takeover targets for southern companies eager to expand into the state. When Australian National Industries Limited made a takeover bid for the engineering firm of Walkers Limited at Maryborough, the move encouraged the Brisbane-based Evans Deakins Industries to put a counter-bid. When Evans Deakins itself came under attack by Clyde Industries Limited, the Treasurer, Llew Edwards, informed the Parliament that the government had purchased three million shares in the Brisbane firm for \$3 a share (which was almost \$1 higher than the market price). The taxpayer-funded purchase was made to defend the company, even though it represented a paper loss of \$3 million. Treasurer Edwards did not really justify the government meddling in the market, except to say that he had heard praise heaped on the government from the senior management of the firm and that the government expected to earn dividends of about \$250 000 from its new shareholding.

Then, after years of opposing the introduction of casinos, the government eventually caved in to pressure from the industry and regional towns eager to secure a licence. The government invited applications from interested operators in mid-1981 and announced that Treasury would evaluate the proposals (*QPD* 1981:vol. 284, p. 1798). Once again, however, the government sought to influence the outcome of the tender process by reshaping the draft legislation to eliminate two-thirds of the 28 tenderers from the final selection process (leaving just nine progressing to the next round). Labor's inveterate whistleblower, Kev Hooper, made a prediction in August 1981 that

[w]hen the casino licences are granted, the consortium led by Sir Leslie Thiess will get a guernsey, and I will tell the House why. Sir Leslie Thiess recently flew his multi-million dollar executive jet to Townsville to attend the National Party conference, even though he is not a member of the National Party. Sir Leslie hung around on the outskirts of the conference waiting to transport National Party Ministers who were inconvenienced by the transport strike. Sir Leslie is openly boasting to his cronies that he is odds-on to get the casino licence at Townsville, as he has already been given a down-payment for services rendered to the Bjelke-Petersen Foundation with the lucrative Winchester South coal-mine lease earlier this year. The moral of the story is that if one makes a hefty donation to the Bjelke-Petersen Foundation, one can do anything in Queensland. (*QPD* 1981:vol. 284, p. 1527)

He was not wrong. Two licences for casinos were granted in 1982: one for Townsville and the other for the Gold Coast (but not one at that stage for Brisbane). Sir Leslie Thiess would secure the Townsville casino licence (the Breakwater Island Resort Proprietary Limited bid controlled by Thiess's Drayton Investments Proprietary Limited). It was reported that the Premier had supported the Thiess bid while Edwards had favoured an alternative bid, even though Edwards stated that the north Queensland licence was based on merit and he would stake his 'reputation and integrity on that' (*QPD* 1982:vol. 287, p. 4280). In March 1982, the Gold Coast licence was granted to Jupiter's Hotel, owned by the Victorian building firm Jennings Industries.

Some years later, it was revealed that Thiess had given substantial free loans to the Hinze family, had rented a Gold Coast penthouse to Russ Hinze and his wife for \$1 a month and, as a result of a defamation case, was also considered to have bribed the Premier. Bjelke-Petersen, however, felt so confident at this time that the opposition had no tangible proof of any direct corruption linked back to his government that he offered in March 1982 to allow the opposition the opportunity to table any documents they might possess that supported their 'allegations, innuendoes and smears regarding casinos, police, gaols or any other matter'. To suggestions that he had accepted a multimillion-dollar bribe over the casino licences, the Premier issued a challenge in the Assembly: 'There is the table. Let us see your documentary proof. Let us see your evidence. Talk is cheap' (*QPD* 1982:vol. 287, p. 4278). Not surprisingly, when asked to show definitive proof, those members of the Assembly most critical of the Premier were not able to table any documents. Some investigatory trails would, however, open up much later (see Fitzgerald 1989:102–3).

The horseracing industry also came in for some direct government assistance when the government announced it would purchase the Albion Park racecourse (through the Racing Corporation) for \$9 million, to enable a major redevelopment to occur. Nev Warburton could not help but point out the irony of 'a Tory, free-enterprise Government being the owner of a multimillion dollar racecourse. It is no wonder that Government members shake their heads in wonderment at their own inconsistencies' (*QPD* 1981:vol. 285, pp. 2717–18).

On the other hand, the government made progress with amendments to the highly contentious *Margarine Act* (a talismanic issue with dairy farmers since the 1950s), streamlining regulations regarding packaging and promotion and bringing them more into line with uniform national legislation across the states. The sale and promotion of margarine had long been controversial in a state highly protective of its dairy industry. Many members believed animal fats were more wholesome than margarine and that butter as a natural dairy product was 'healthy for you'. They complained that margarine manufacturers were creating an artificial product (from sunflower seeds!) and trying to mislead consumers

with suggestive advertisements. The Primary Industries Minister, Mike Ahern, said that in his 14 years in the Parliament he had sat through many difficult debates about the liberalisation of margarine, but in this instance he thanked members for their general support, adding that ‘all members displayed a spirit of goodwill towards the legislation’ (*QPD* 1982:vol. 287, p. 4710). He promised members that the new clauses calling for ministerial approval before margarine could be promoted and sold would be interpreted with discretion and that ‘the spirit of the legislation will be kept clearly in mind’ in his deliberations.

Ahern was probably the first Primary Industries Minister in Queensland to recognise that some deregulation of the highly restrictive, producer-inspired regulations was a necessary economic adjustment. He received fewer bouquets from the opposition, however, when he introduced the Sugar Acquisition Bill in late 1982, with Labor members claiming they had not been given time to find out the implications of the bill and that a promised public inquiry had not eventuated. Ahern hit back, saying, ‘I have not heard so much rhetoric, hyperbole and sheer fiction spoken in this Chamber for a long time’ (*QPD* 1982:vol. 289, p. 1859).

## Circuses and distractions

Speculation increased in late 1981 that a ministerial reshuffle was in the wings. The *Courier-Mail* suggested on 21 October that Vic Sullivan and Ken Tomkins, two National Party ministers, would be dropped from the ministry. Sullivan had been a minister for 14 years by then, having been appointed first in January 1968 by Jack Pizzey. Tomkins had joined Bjelke-Petersen’s fourth ministry after the 1974 election. The Minister for Commerce and Industry, Vic Sullivan, made an unorthodox rebuttal to these rumours by making a formal ministerial statement to the Parliament. His statement, which was described by Rosemary Kyburz as nothing more than a ‘political speech’, denied Tomkins or he would be sacked and pointed out that the Premier had gone ‘to the trouble of issuing a complete denial of any reshuffle or any dismissal’. For the record, Sullivan denied the two ministers ‘were incompetent’ and that ‘the party was disillusioned with us’. He demanded the journalist concerned, Peter Morley, be sacked for concocting a harsh ‘story based on bar-room gossip—based on animosity—or an attempt at political back-stabbing’ (*QPD* 1981:vol. 285, p. 3115). He then launched into a tirade against Morley and journalists who perpetuated the ‘pure fabrication’ of reports that often fed into radio and television news.

Given that the Premier had been forced to state publicly that no reshuffle was being considered, his hands were now tied. If the Premier had been considering making changes, the story effectively put an end to that for the time being.

There were also some suggestions that National Party parliamentarians were seeking about the same time to depose Sullivan as deputy party leader and replace him with Mike Ahern, who had recently joined the ministry (a meeting to discuss this issue was apparently called but was cancelled by the Premier).

Lindsay Hartwig (Ind., Callide) later claimed that ‘Morley wrote what he was told to write’, implying perhaps the Premier had briefed the journalist (*QPD* 1981:vol. 285, p. 3248). He added a little later that the ‘Premier has not denied that they will be sacked’ and said:

When I came here there was such a thing as seniority. No matter who he is, a person who is elected as a member of Parliament must have a chance of getting into Cabinet. The latest technique does away with seniority. To get into Cabinet, a member needs to have gone to the right school, to be of the right religion, and to be a few other things. (*QPD* 1981:vol. 285, p. 3397)

In July 1982, both ministers were again given a verbal dressing down by the Premier—in cabinet and in private—and by the media, for taking a seven-day ‘fishing trip’ around the islands of the Torres Strait in the government-owned coastal ketch, the *Melbidir*, along with Ted Lyons, some Coalition backbenchers (such as Bob Moore and Len Stephan), public servants and other friends. The trip seemed to be a jaunt at taxpayers’ expense for no particular purpose except to escape the Brisbane winter and enjoy a spot of fishing.<sup>4</sup> Although the Nationals began to talk of a spill, the Premier told the *Courier-Mail* (21 July 1982) that ‘it was not the time, place or circumstances to give Mr Sullivan a kick in the pants’. Both Sullivan and Tomkins indicated, however, that they would not recontest their seats at the 1983 election, with Tomkins expressing the sentiment that he had entered the Parliament principally ‘to have fun’ and, after having some fun, he now felt the fun was gone and it was ‘getting a bit hard’ (*Courier-Mail*, 22 July 1982).

That Morley might not have been fabricating his news reports was revealed in December 1982 when both Sullivan and Tomkins were dropped from cabinet. The two new ministers appointed as replacements were Lin Powell, who came in as Minister for Education, and John Goleby, assuming the position of Minister for Water Resources and Maritime Services. Bill Gunn was promoted to the Commerce and Industry portfolio and responsibility for police was shifted from Hinze to Bill Glasson. The ageing Minister for Works and Housing, Claude

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<sup>4</sup> It was not uncommon for parliamentarians from both sides of the Chamber and their associates to make pleasure trips on the *Melbidir*. When Sullivan and Tomkins were criticised for their holiday, Bob Moore stated that the ALP was being hypocritical as many of its MPs had taken similar trips (naming R. Jones, P. Tucker, M. Thackeray, R. Bousen, J. Aiken and L. Jensen), adding that many journalists such as Dick Palk, Peter Trundle, Hugh Lunn, Allen Callaghan and a young Michelle Grattan had also enjoyed the hospitality.

Wharton, also came in for some attack, with Labor members claiming that, at the age of almost seventy years, he was in ‘the twilight of his career’ and that the ‘long knives are out, and his days are numbered’ (*QPD* 1982:vol. 288, pp. 951–2). Kev Hooper mischievously claimed that a relative newcomer, Geoff Muntz (NP, Whitsunday), was after Wharton’s job. Hooper said Muntz was the

member whose name the National Party pundits are touting. He has all the attributes. He is not overbright. He has a good, solid, National Party background. His good father was the numbers man for Mr Hinze on the Gold Coast. As is said in National Party circles, it’s dollars to doughnuts that Mr Muntz will be the next Minister [for Works and Housing]. (*QPD* 1982:vol. 288, pp. 951–2)

Muntz would make the ministry but not until August 1983 after the Coalition dissolved. In a subsequent debate on the appointment of Supreme Court judges, Hooper described Des Frawley of making a ‘terribly sexist remark’ and epitomising ‘the male chauvinist pig in this Chamber’ after he had said ‘some of us are glad that there is not’ a woman on the bench (*QPD* 1982:vol. 288, p. 1046). In response to allegations aired in the media that he had abused his expenses, Frawley later complained of the poor deal politicians got, saying he would be glad to leave the place. Claiming MPs were not overpaid, he fumed:

Members of Parliament cannot even obtain an allowance for clothing. My salary of \$33,600 a year is not excessive, and I want the rise. When I retire from Parliament after the next election I will make just as much money as I earn now. I would not come back into Parliament if I was paid a salary of \$50,000 and an allowance of \$20,000. When my present term is finished, I am out for good. I shall never enter Parliament again. I can earn just as much money outside Parliament in private enterprise. (*QPD* 1982:vol. 288, p. 1091)

He also spoke of the long hours politicians put in, the many thankless tasks he undertook and the public meetings he attended, which all contributed to a ‘mental torture’. He later complained of being made to make a \$250 donation to the Bjelke-Petersen Foundation, saying ‘it did hurt’ (*QPD* 1982:vol. 289, p. 1508).

During 1982, much attention in Queensland was focused on the XII Commonwealth Games, held at the specially built Queen Elizabeth II Stadium in Brisbane, during late September and early October. Bill Knox presented a bill making the opening day of the games (30 September) a public holiday. The games—like Expo 88, the plans for which were already under way—was intended to be a showcase for not only Queensland but the government itself. The government sought to enact special legislation but left it until relatively late in the piece.

The Commonwealth Games Bill was introduced only in late November 1981 and passed in March 1982. It provided for increased and emergency powers for the police in the case of the threat of terrorism or civil disturbance (and political protests) and for security guards to execute their powers of arrest if people did not follow their directions. Police also began checking ticket sales to ensure known protesters could not gain access to venues while pretending to be spectators. The Labor opposition labelled the bill as overkill (following an editorial in the *West Australian*), with Tom Burns suggesting, with some sarcasm, ‘the legislation is an example of the National Party policy that it will show the world how a free society works even if it has to lock everybody up in the process’ (*QPD* 1982:vol. 287, p. 4476). Three other topics associated with the games attracted attention in the Parliament: a special high-alcohol beer had been produced to commemorate the games; souvenirs were manufactured in Hong Kong and not Queensland; and not enough Queensland athletes had been selected because of discrimination from ‘southern selectors’.

Despite a threat of a black African boycott, the games was a huge success, although not everybody was happy with every detail. Bjelke-Petersen moved a motion recording the Parliament’s appreciation to all who had contributed to the success of the games. Reminiscent of former Prime Minister Robert Menzies when the Queen made her first official visit, the Premier said the Queen’s presence had provided ‘the people of our State with the opportunity to express their loyalty and support’. He continued: ‘Nowhere was that support more evident than at the tumultuous closing ceremony. The emotion of those moments as Her Majesty departed the arena will live in everyone’s memory. Never have we witnessed a more heartfelt a more spontaneous expression of good will towards our monarch’ (*QPD* 1982:vol. 288, pp. 1203–4).

Dr Edwards made a special point of thanking the magnificent ‘hostesses’ at the events, who were ‘charming, beautifully attired, courteous and enthusiastic’ (*QPD* 1982:vol. 288, p. 1205). Scottish athletes were not as impressed; they complained that they had to camp in office accommodation built nearby at Griffith University’s Nathan campus and had to share one shower!

## **From reserves to limited Aboriginal land tenure**

Indigenous issues began to attract increased attention by the 1980s. Queensland had adopted a paternalistic stance towards the various Indigenous communities and was certainly not at the forefront of progressive reform. Remote communities were administered as ‘reserves’ with any property managed by appointed directors. When the Parliament had focused on Aboriginal matters, it had more recently been in relation to preserving Aboriginal relics. An Aboriginal

and Islander Commission had been established in 1979, providing some level of representation to Indigenous peoples and allowing coordination with Indigenous local councils. The Premier was not sympathetic to the concept of Aboriginal self-determination or to the granting of full Indigenous title to lands and had blocked earlier attempts by Indigenous groups to purchase a pastoral lease (leading to the famous *Koowarta vs Bjelke-Petersen* case in the High Court in May 1982). Bjelke-Petersen had no time for Aboriginal activists or Indigenous leaders who sought greater recognition of their culture and traditional ownership of the land. In particular, he resented Indigenous protests on land rights issues at public events such as the Commonwealth Games. Indeed, he had stated publicly that Aboriginal activists were being trained in Libya to undertake terrorist activities—a claim vehemently denied by the Indigenous community and the Commonwealth Department of Foreign Affairs.

Nevertheless, the government decided in 1982 to grant Aboriginal and Islander communities limited land tenure: a restricted Aboriginal leasehold ownership of lands for 50 years. The new tenure did not include freehold title of land or mineral rights. The legislation—the Land Act (Aboriginal and Islander Land Grants) Amendment Bill—was rushed through the Parliament in just four days, with criticisms that Aboriginal communities had not been adequately consulted (although church leaders apparently had been consulted). Under the act, local councils would be given land tenure under a ‘deed of grant in trust’ (DOGIT) arrangement whereby the minerals remained the property of the Crown and the leasehold could be revoked under the *Land Act*. While Aboriginal groups were unsure about the benefits of the land title changes and how secure they were, the issue led to a major argument between the President of the National Party, Sir Robert Sparkes, and the Premier. Sparkes wanted the legislation to itemise the specific transgressions that could result in local councils having their land title revoked (see *AJPH* 1982:vol. 28, no. 3). After the two had a ‘blazing row’ in Rockhampton, the Premier was supposed to have walked out of the meeting (*QPD* 1982:vol. 287, p. 4716).

The Labor Party opposed the legislation outright, with some members claiming it was a ‘cruel deception’ (Jim Fouras) that would ‘confuse the very people whom it was meant to benefit’ (Bob Scott). The amendment bill led to a lengthy debate lasting well into the early hours of the next sitting day (see *QPD* 1982:vol. 287, pp. 5172–4, 5304–49, 5377–418), but was eventually passed in March 1982. In the next Parliament, the Minister for Aboriginal and Island Affairs, Bob Katter, moved a bill that extended the deed of grant in perpetuity (*QPD* 1985:vol. 298, p. 4894). Subsequent amendments to this act were made in 1984 and 1985.

## Towards the bitter end

Bjelke-Petersen returned from an overseas trip to New Zealand to find that in his absence cabinet had made a decision on establishing a register of foreign ownership contrary to his expressed wishes. Once returned, he declared the draft legislation void and said that such a register would discourage foreign investment in Queensland and would never become law while he was Premier. Labor accused him of displaying the tantrums of a 'spoilt child' over his behaviour with the cabinet. He did, however, allow the Standing Orders Committee to meet (up to six times) in 1982, after which it produced a report in March 1982 that was finally accepted in February 1983. The report advocated some minor changes to question time (the rotation of questions between the opposition and government, with members being allowed to ask up to three questions). When the committee's report was debated and some opposition members criticised the timidity of the reforms, the government Whip, Don Neal (NP, Balonne), said prosaically 'let us not rush in' to formalising proposed changes (*QPD* 1983:vol. 290, p. 3407). On the other hand, the Parliament was being summoned to meet far less frequently. When the second session of Parliament adjourned on 30 March 1983, it had met for only 11 days in the past nine months. It would meet for only another three full days in August before being dissolved as an emergency measure on 9 August—well before the 1983 election.

Industrial disputes were again on the rise, with state government blue-collar workers (represented by 21 unions) beginning a 35-hour week campaign in 1982. Cabinet had apparently agreed to a 38-hour week for its own blue-collar workforce—again, when Bjelke-Petersen was overseas—but final approval had stalled on particular trade-offs from the unions. A rail strike was called, which paralysed the state railways and led to accusations of communist infiltration into the unions. Don Lane, Transport Minister, suggested that the strike was political, seeking to bring down the government. He quoted from a number of pamphlets with slogans such as 'Let's hit the streets and Smash Joe' and 'Joh must go' (*QPD* 1982:vol. 288, p. 508). Even Labor members referred to the strike as 'a dispute that could cripple Queensland' although their attack was reserved for the government for declaring a state of emergency under the *Essential Services Act* (Ron McLean, in *QPD* 1982:vol. 288, p. 449).

The Coalition's final budget to secure parliamentary approval (for 1982/83) was brought down by Treasurer Edwards in September 1982. Edwards reported that the previous budget had resulted in a small deficit of \$170 888—much less than anticipated since an economic recession was under way and there were higher than expected wage increases for government employees. The main features of his budget were: Queensland would receive a net increase in Commonwealth revenues of 8.1 per cent; the government would continue to provide free public

hospital treatment; there was increased demand for essential services from population growth; rail freight revenues would be impacted by the depressed demand for coal by Japan; and the government would direct any additional resources to education. Total revenues and expenditures were expected to be \$3.668 billion. His budget contained some tax increases (with rail freight rates increased by 15 per cent and a doubling of stamp duties on motor vehicles and boats) although other concessions were relaxed (such as payroll tax and stamp duties on residential homes). Edwards reminded the Parliament that Queensland had the 'enviable position of being the lowest tax State in Australia' and had given significant concessions in death duties, payroll tax, land tax, stamp duty, road maintenance charges and permit fees (*QPD* 1982:vol. 288, p. 1147). Education received a 20 per cent increase, rising to \$838 million (including decreasing class sizes as recommended by the Ahern Select Committee). Culture and arts received a 29 per cent increase, rising to just less than \$5 million; road spending increased by 19.5 per cent to \$405 million; police numbers were increased by 154, bringing their budget up to \$172 million or a 22 per cent increase. Public health and hospitals received \$640 million, up by 20 per cent; railways were allocated \$697 million; primary industries received \$79 million compared with welfare services, which received \$69 million, which had also increased by 22 per cent. An amount of \$1.5 million could be found for national parks. Edwards claimed the budget was 'a very satisfactory one' with overall spending up by 17 per cent. To many, it was a pre-election budget with substantial increases in public spending. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) indicated in early 1983 that Queensland had the highest budget deficit of all states (\$460 per capita) in both absolute and relative terms and that, contrary to the government's low-tax mantra, it had been increasing taxes at a rate that was the second-fastest in Australia (*AJPH* 1983:vol. 29, no. 3, p. 491).

## **The boot is on the other foot—and the resignation of Ed Casey**

Labor continued to accuse the government of bribery and corruption in the Assembly, even if specific allegations could not often be proved. The boot was placed on the other foot when the Premier accused Ed Casey of taking bribes before the 1980 election of up to \$30 000 from a Mr Ted Vibert from the Australian Club Development Association to gain the party's support for introducing poker machines. There were no allegations Casey had taken the money personally, but rather that he had sought to open special campaign accounts with the Commonwealth Bank to assist Labor's 1980 campaign. The Premier claimed that Casey had been bribed and that it was an offence to bribe a Member of Parliament. Casey denied to the media that he had received such

funds, but was later forced to correct his story, admitting he had received the money. At the next cabinet meeting, Bjelke-Petersen discussed whether he should recall the Parliament to debate the Opposition Leader's behaviour and whether he had acted improperly.

The matter was allowed to drop only after it was revealed that Vibert had made some other donations, to sympathetic Liberal Party candidates, and had also made a donation to the Bjelke-Petersen Foundation. Senior government members were fearful the issue would backfire on them if they continued to pursue it. The Premier, undeterred, set up a Dorothy Dixier from Ted Row (NP, Hinchinbrook) in August 1982 asking him about the police investigations. In answering Row, the Premier alleged Casey had refused to be interviewed by police and that an inconclusive report had been submitted to the Justice Department for consideration. Casey denied he had refused to cooperate with the police and attempted to clear himself of any impropriety. In future years, it would be revealed that prominent politicians on both sides accepted monies from developers and business interests and tried to conceal such illicit payments from any public scrutiny. Large cash donations from lobbyists associated with the poker machine industry, in particular, were a favourite source of such funds.

The scandal was not over, however, for Casey. Immediately after the budget was delivered, Bill Hewitt claimed Casey was 'constantly having to look over his shoulder because his own leadership [was] by no means secure'. He described Casey as a 'Claytons' leader (that is, not the real thing, referring to the non-alcoholic drink) (see *QPD* 1982:vol. 288, p. 1236). He blamed the deputy Labor leader, Bill D'Arcy, for the destabilisation, saying Casey had but three options: invite D'Arcy to give his support to the next election, challenge his leader or step down from his post. While Kev Hooper claimed in the House in September 1982 that there was no move to depose Casey, he was ousted during the second week back after a parliamentary break.

The Parliament was informed on 21 October that Keith Wright had been elected leader, with Neville Warburton (who was soon called the 'invisible man') as his deputy. Wright was relatively independent of the Labor factions, but, in the words of one journalist, he had 'risen entirely without trace' (Charlton 1983:128). He came in for an immediate baptism of fire with Llew Edwards and Bob Katter both claiming in sequence that the new leader was not interested in economic issues and 'did not appear to consider the Budget of Queensland as of major importance, because at no stage during the debate did he address the committee' (*QPD* 1982:vol. 289, pp. 1695, 1912). The Premier also cryptically insinuated in a television interview that Wright 'would not be where he is if people knew what I know' (Walter and Dickie 1985:36). Later in the 1983 election campaign, he was even more caustic, continually referring to Wright as 'Mr Wrong' (Coaldrake 1989:11). He also accused Wright of having misused

his parliamentary entitlements (as reported by Auditor-General Jim Peel's report) and owing some \$3042 to consolidated revenue (*QPD* 1982:vol. 289, p. 2680). These instances of MPs abusing travel entitlements (and refusing to make reimbursement) were subsequently dredged up to attack various Labor spokespeople whenever they accused the government side of inappropriate behaviour. Peel reputedly received a roasting from those MPs named in his report.

## The futility of taking strong principled stances

Two seemingly routine appointments in 1981–82 both erupted into controversy and strained the bonds of unity in the Coalition. Both involved the Premier determining to impose his own preferences over the cabinet and, in particular, over senior Liberal ministers who had other views or objected to the Premier's choice. Both caused crises in the Coalition and led to dissident Liberal backbenchers taking a stronger line against their own leadership, who they accused of not standing up to the Premier.

First, the Premier decided to appoint his friend and confidant Sir Edward Lyons to the post of Chairman of the TAB in May 1981, against the wishes of Liberal ministers who saw this as nepotism. Lyons had been actively lobbying over the casino licences and was a powerful voice behind the government. Bjelke-Petersen had an Executive Council minute prepared indicating Lyons would be appointed to chair the TAB board and circulated this to the full cabinet, but the seven Liberal ministers refused to sign the minute to indicate their agreement. The Premier, nevertheless, managed to convince the Governor, Sir James Ramsay, to endorse the appointment. Perhaps celebrating too profusely, Lyons was apparently picked up for drink-driving but, Labor alleged, after a phone call from the Premier to the Police Commissioner, Terry Lewis, no charges were laid, but later he was summonsed. The Police Minister, Russ Hinze, refused to instigate an open inquiry.

Then, during the summer of 1981–82, the Coalition again split over the appointment of a new chief justice. The Liberal Attorney-General, Sam Doumany, took a shortlist of candidates to cabinet, headed by the most senior judge, Mr Justice Jim Douglas. Bjelke-Petersen did not support this proposal; indeed, he vetoed it, because he had been told (by Don Lane, who had seen the paperwork) that Douglas had once voted Labor in a postal ballot—at the 1972 state election for the seat of Merthyr.<sup>5</sup> Instead, the Premier favoured Mr

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5 Coaldrake (1989:86) also claims that the Premier objected to 'the view that the preferred choice of the judiciary should be automatically endorsed by the government' and that he was miffed that he had been barred from attending the official opening of the new Supreme Court building in 1981 because he was a

Justice Dormer (Bob) Andrews, as did Lyons, who had been lobbying for the appointment of Andrews. Doumany threatened to resign from the ministry if his nomination was not accepted. After protracted discussions and a two-hour cabinet fight, Doumany proved unable to convince the Premier and his National Party ministers, but managed to have his second choice accepted as a compromise candidate: Sir Walter Campbell, a judge of the Supreme Court. Then, at the Premier's instigation, cabinet proceeded to make a second appointment to the court (Senior Puisne Judge) with the Premier insisting his candidate, Andrews, be appointed. After another two-hour debate, Bjelke-Petersen had another Executive Council minute prepared nominating Andrews, but, when the Liberal ministers were asked to sign, they expressed their dissent. Knox wrote 'with the exception of William E Knox' (that is, he did not agree to the recommendation), and the other six ministers including Lane wrote: 'this minute does not have my support' (see Lane 1993: Appendices 5, 6, 7). Bill Hewitt recalled the Premier looking directly at Knox and saying 'even you Bill?'

Doumany did not carry out his threat to resign his post. Instead he told the Parliament, when asked in March:

First of all, I did not make any public statement to the effect that I would resign. In fact, I clarified that many times but the media did not want to clarify it. The matters of the appointment of the Chief Justice and the other appointment to the Supreme Court are closed. It is time to allow the court to operate in the interests of the State and its people. Frankly, at this stage I see no use whatsoever in pursuing the matter further. (QPD 1982:vol. 287, p. 4433)

So, behind the scenes (and sometimes publicly) Liberal ministers took these strong, principled stances against the Premier, on occasions banding together as a dissenting bloc. When they lost, however, they appeared to accept the outcome too meekly. In some ways, taking a stance and losing, then not doing anything about it, harmed the political standing of senior Liberals among their own colleagues.

## **The demise of the Coalition: the security blanket is withdrawn**

After more than 25 years in existence, the formal coalition between the National and Liberal Parties came to a sudden end. Relations had long been acrimonious and both parties had contributed in their own ways to the corrosion of the

arrangements. There was not one single reason or action that led to the collapse of the coalition but, rather, a multitude of factors had been simmering for almost two decades and they were coming to boiling point.

The Nationals had slowly eroded the initial coalition agreement to keep the number of ministries relatively equal between the parties. More and more they had advantaged themselves at the expense of the Liberals. Under Bjelke-Petersen, the ratio of Nationals in cabinet to Liberals had gone from seven to six, to 11 to seven. They operated from an ingrained belief that they ‘owned’ their political territory and seats within it and regularly admonished the Liberals for running three-cornered contests against their sitting members (or in seats they regarded as theirs). They had fiercely rebuffed Liberal attempts to capture any of their seats and, on the few occasions when the Liberals had won a National seat, fought back and retook those seats (leaving only Redcliffe as a former National seat held by the Liberals in 1982–83). The Premier was quite prepared to work with ardent coalitionists who worked for the government and did not oppose his plans, but was increasingly determined he would not work with dissidents who were not above all else loyal to the Coalition. He told the Parliament ‘I am fighting for democracy now. I have been fighting for democracy for most of my life’ (*QPD* 1983:vol. 290, p. 3048)—democracy presumably meant entrenching National Party rule!

The Liberals were infuriated at the ‘permanency’ of their junior status and their own incapacity to rectify the situation. In every other state, the Liberal Party was the superior partner, whereas in Queensland it was regularly humiliated. They were incensed by the erosion of ministerial posts in cabinet, the allocation of Liberal ministers to lesser portfolios and fights over Treasury. They had opposed many of the Premier’s idiosyncratic schemes or laws, such as the Tarong power station, street marches, the Bellevue demolition, various government appointments and some of his more crackpot ventures. The outright reluctance of the Nationals to cease their advantageous manipulation of rural and regional electoral weighting was seen as denying the Liberals their rightful heritage (see Miller and Koch 1983). Moreover, while the Liberal backbench and many local branch members had for some time sought to differentiate themselves from the Nationals, especially over issues of accountability, this strategy had risen to new heights under the leadership of Llew Edwards.

Symbolic of the need to differentiate, the Liberals coalesced around the fundamental issue of a public accounts committee (PAC) for the Queensland Parliament. The lack of a PAC had been a constant source of irritation for both the Liberals and the ALP and various proposals had been hotly debated in the Parliament for many years. It was seen as a litmus test of how far the Nationals would accommodate Liberal sensibilities. Labor had been goading the Liberals in public over why they would not unilaterally support the introduction of a

public accounts committee (to which Labor would contribute its numbers in support). Edwards' pragmatic response was that establishing a public accounts committee *was* Liberal Party policy, but the Liberals were part of a coalition so could not act until the Nationals also agreed.

Tensions were heightened when two Liberal MPs (Bill Kaus and Bob Moore) jumped ship to join the Nationals in July 1983. Kaus and Moore had been disendorsed in Liberal preselections for their seats of Mansfield and Windsor. Their defections took the number of National seats to 37 in the Assembly—still five short of a majority. Although Moore claimed Kaus had been knifed by the Transport Minister, Don Lane, to bolster his own numbers in his push towards the leadership, Lane blamed the party executive for dispatching two pro-coalition MPs. The party's president, Gary Neat, and Terry Gygar were both blamed in the Parliament for cutting off the heads of these backbenchers.

The rift in the Coalition intensified and then imploded almost by accident when the Speaker lost control of the Parliament on 4 August 1983. Initially, the Speaker, Sel Muller, ruled that permission to move a motion without notice (to suspend *Standing Orders*—in other words, government business—to enable the Parliament to discuss the establishment of a PAC) from Ian Prentice was agreed to, saying the 'ayes have it'. He then contradicted himself, first by calling for a division, then cancelling his decision. Edwards, fearing a divisive vote on such an issue, tried to pretend that the Speaker's cancellation was for the motion without notice, when it appeared to have been on the need for a division. By then completely confused, Muller ruled that the debate continue, but members now did not know whether this meant normal business or the motion without notice. At a subsequent division, the motion was lost by 45 to 32, meaning the House had not given permission to Prentice to move his motion without notice to suspend government business. Prentice would later pay dearly for his stance, sacrificing his political and legal career, as 'Bjelke-Petersen demanded, and got, a ban on solicitors' firms giving Prentice work as a barrister' (Lamont 2005:2).

Ten Liberals sided with the Nationals to defeat Prentice's motion, including five of their ministers. The Environment Minister, Bill Hewitt, abstained, but was accused by the Premier of being disloyal and hiding in the toilets (as a minister, it could have been more courageous to have abstained—and in fact he was in the gallery watching the proceedings!). One relatively new (and junior) minister, however, Terry White, along with seven Liberal backbenchers (Akers, Greenwood, Gygar, Innes, Kyburz, Prentice and Scassola) all joined Labor in voting in support of the motion (see Miller and Koch 1983). The split was on.

Terry White, as Minister for Welfare Services, crossed the floor over a minor procedural issue (but substantively over a proposal to establish a PAC). The Nationals regarded a cabinet minister voting against the government as a hanging

offence. It is not clear whether White had crossed the government on a *policy* issue (as cabinet had not made a decision either way on establishing an accounts committee), but he had shown political dissent against his own government, thus breaching cabinet solidarity. After question time was over, a special cabinet meeting was called (to which Hewitt and White were not invited) after which Edwards sought White's resignation, which was not forthcoming, so Edwards sacked him. Surprisingly, the Parliament spent the rest of the afternoon with a distracting polemical debate about the threat to the federal system posed by the new Hawke Labor government, moved by the Premier with an emotional speech on states' rights.

Events then became frenetic. With the Parliament in disarray and 'uncontrollable', the Premier sought a special adjournment from the Assembly on the morning of 9 August. White announced he would challenge Edwards for the leadership at a special meeting of their parliamentary party on the afternoon of the same day. Edwards had the backing of the Premier and thought he was safe and could just survive, but he had given a number of his colleagues reason to be disaffected with his leadership and had lost the support of the party's organisational wing. Edwards attempted to portray the reason for White's sacking as one of disloyalty in not supporting government business in the House, but he looked disingenuous (especially as it appeared publicly that White had been sacked for his support of an accounts committee). At the party meeting, Edwards did not have the support necessary to carry on as leader. He tried to prevent a spill motion for the leadership post and, when he lost this, he immediately left the meeting and resigned the party leadership on the spot (although he remained Treasurer and Deputy Premier for another week).

White was elected unopposed as the new leader with Sam Doumany as his deputy. They announced the new leadership arrangement and set off walking to the Executive Building to call on the Premier. The Premier left them waiting in the reception area for an hour before speaking to them for 15 minutes. Bjelke-Petersen refused to accept White back into the ministry, preferring to keep Edwards on as Treasurer. Bjelke-Petersen's so-called 'knock-out' victory was then to call a meeting of six Liberal ministers on 15 August at which he ascertained that they were reluctant to resign and were doing so only because the Liberal Party executive insisted. The Premier conveyed the 'reluctant' resignations of all seven Liberal ministers to the Governor, Sir James Ramsay, that same day. On the Premier's advice, the Governor refused to accept the 'reluctant' resignations. Bjelke-Petersen had managed to pull a rabbit from the hat. As two journalists said at the time, the Liberal ministers, 'with the exception of Hewitt, were pretty happy that an "out" had been found; they had stood up for their party by resigning, but their resignations had been rejected' (Miller and Koch 1983:35).

Meanwhile, White, who was feeling ambushed, wrote to the Premier (on 11 August) stating he should not have been sacked and should be reappointed. The Premier ignored his pleading letter. The next day, White then had the Liberal State President, Dr John Herron, issue a public ultimatum to the Premier stating that, unless White was reinstated, no coalition between the parties existed. The Premier was given until 7 pm on Sunday (14 August) to respond, but he ignored the demand. The Liberals had called a press conference in anticipation of an answer, when in the words of a former Liberal minister:

The deadline for Joh to accept White as Deputy Premier came at 7 pm, and in anticipation the media were assembled in depth. It did not have the dignity of most state funerals but was just as final in its consequences. This was enhanced by the spectacle of White dramatically tearing up a piece of paper—a press statement as it happened—to dramatise the tearing up of the coalition *by* the National Party! Television editors and other story-tellers have since used that scene frequently to demonstrate Terry White tearing up the coalition agreement, a distortion of what actually took place. It is a piece of drama that I don't think he will ever live down and it has already been enshrined in history. (Lane 1993:112)

Politically, Bjelke-Petersen benefited enormously from the impression that White had 'torn up' the Coalition agreement.

Keen to assert himself as Premier-in-waiting, Labor's Keith Wright first called on the entire Liberal parliamentary party to join with Labor and form a short-term Liberal–Labor administration, which was refused by the Liberals. Wright would later release details of his cabinet, implying Labor was ready to govern, and gave notice that the Treasury portfolio would be replaced with two departments: finance and economic development (*Daily Sun*, 15 October 1983).

Tired of the fight, the former Attorney-General, Sam Doumany, after less than a week as deputy Liberal leader, indicated he would step down from the position to attend to his electoral duties. He fought the 1983 election as a Liberal (and lost his seat) but then drifted to the Nationals. Meanwhile, Colin Miller (Lib., Ithaca) was appointed to the ministry as Environment Minister in August 1983 replacing White (with Hewitt moving to White's former portfolio). All seven Liberal ministers, however, resigned en masse for a second time on 18 August, and this time their resignations were accepted. Edwards decided to retire from politics and not contest his seat at the forthcoming election.

The Governor, on advice from the Premier, dissolved the Parliament on 13 September 1983.

## The ‘rump executive’: governing without calling the Parliament

It was a tough time for the Nationals to contemplate governing alone in circumstances in which they could find themselves as a minority government. Throughout the early 1980s, the Nationals had been rocked by a series of controversies and political scandals, coming in short succession one after another. The media was beginning to highlight conflicts of interest, nepotism, abuses of power and suggestions of outright political corruption. Decisions over new developments and project approvals seemed to be determined in mysterious and reprehensible ways, certainly without much transparency. The eponymous Bjelke-Petersen Foundation was regarded with suspicion and distrust.

By 1983, Bjelke-Petersen’s claim of superior economic management was looking increasingly hollow as a state recession loomed and the unemployment rate rose to one of the highest in the country (jumping from 54 000 to 75 700). The ‘cranes on the skyline’ test was slipping. Although the Queensland government had agreed to abide by the nation-wide wages pause called by the Fraser government, and held some charges and fees down, it allowed politicians’ salaries to rise by almost 12 per cent in September 1982 and by a further \$500 per annum in December 1982.

The rump ministry retained the 11 National ministers, augmented with six novice Nationals promoted to the ministry (Angelo Bertoni, Neil Turner, Vince Lester, Martin Tenni, Nev Harper and Geoff Muntz). The Premier assumed the portfolio responsibility for Treasury. The full ministry consisted of

- Premier and Treasurer: Johannes Bjelke-Petersen
- Deputy Premier and Minister for Commerce and Industry: Bill Gunn
- Minister for Local Government, Main Roads and Racing: Russ Hinze
- Minister for Northern Development and Aboriginal and Island Affairs: Val Bird
- Minister for Works and Housing: Claude Wharton
- Minister for Mines and Energy: Ivan Gibbs
- Minister for Primary Industries: Mike Ahern
- Minister for Lands, Forestry and Police: Bill Glasson
- Minister for Tourism, National Parks, Sport and the Arts: Tony Elliott
- Minister for Education: Lin Powell
- Minister for Water Resources and Maritime Services: John Goleby
- Minister for Justice and Attorney-General: Nev Harper
- Minister for Employment and Industrial Affairs: Vince Lester

- Minister for Transport: Neil Turner
- Minister for Health: Angelo Bertoni
- Minister for Welfare Services and Ethnic Affairs: Geoff Muntz
- Minister for Environment, Valuation and Administrative Services: Martin Tenni

Between August and November, the ‘rump’ executive led by Bjelke-Petersen governed alone, not wishing to call an election and not wishing to summon the Parliament, where confidence in the government could be tested and possibly lost. The Governor was apparently content (at the Premier’s behest) for the minority government to govern and make decisions without testing whether it in fact had the confidence of the House. Politically, the government was in effect a ‘caretaker government’, which should have administered the state in caretaker mode until the election outcome was known and without making any major decisions. The Governor was, however, content to regard the new executive constitutionally as a successive ministry, with full powers even though the election date had been announced for 22 October (more than two months away). In supporting the Premier so openly, the Governor’s decisions led to some criticism from outside observers because they challenged many of the understood constitutional conventions about ‘confidence’ and ‘caretaker’ status.

Eventually, the minority Nationals governed alone for 82 days precisely to demonstrate they *could* do so, giving Bjelke-Petersen time to display that he did not require the Liberals in his ministry to form an effective single-party government. Cabinet continued to meet, decisions were taken and announced. Importantly, therefore, the Nationals’ ‘rump’ served its intended purpose: permitting time for the government to administer the state while simultaneously adopting a perpetual campaigning mode. Local media reports predicting that the dawn of a new political era was fast approaching were premature (*Sunday Sun*, 16 October 1983).

The Nationals favoured a fear campaign. The Premier, falling back on familiar rhetoric, sought to tarnish Labor as a dangerous party of socialists and high taxes, which would do the bidding of the centralist and corporatist Hawke government. With the other mainland states having voted in Labor governments, the Nationals presented themselves as Queensland’s defenders from the ‘socialist’ menace that had swept much of Australia. With superior campaign tactics, the Nationals aimed their campaign at parochial appeal and the paternalism of strong leadership. One of the party’s main campaign advertisements was a map of Australia coloured entirely red, except for Queensland and Tasmania, with the slogan ‘Now, more than ever, Queensland needs Joh’. Rather than outline a raft of new policies, however, Bjelke-Petersen focused on his past achievements. He recommitted himself to maintaining the state’s low-tax regime and boasted

of Queensland's reputation as being friendly to business. His campaign stressed the traditional message that only the progressive, free enterprise-orientated National Party could ensure Queensland's continuing economic growth and prosperity. On his next ministry, he ventured that he would consider admitting Liberal ministers to a future conservative government—but *not* anyone who had voted in the leadership ballot for Terry White, whom he considered a small-l Liberal. The Nationals claimed that the Liberal Party was one of 'socialist-lites' and 'trendies', with the Premier suggesting its leader had shown his willingness to flirt with the ALP and could not be trusted with running the affairs of the state.

The Liberal Party's campaign stressed traditional individual values. It played up the themes of the rights of ordinary citizens to a job, economic prosperity and open and accountable government. It portrayed itself as the real defender of the Westminster system. Emphasising the Liberal Party's commitment to accountability in government, White campaigned strongly on the issue of a parliamentary Public Accounts Committee. White's strong advocacy for the PAC was in part based on his claim that PACs elsewhere had saved millions of dollars. He claimed a PAC would enable the government to slash state taxes. White sought to differentiate the Liberals from the Nationals in social and environmental policy areas and stressed the right to peaceful protest would be restored under a Liberal-led government.

Labor entered the campaign with renewed vigour. Wright campaigned energetically around the state and early polling suggested that Labor would perform well. In the campaign, Labor highlighted the divisions between the conservative parties, claiming it was now the only party that could provide political stability. 'Let them fight and let us govern' was a frequent catchcry. Central to Labor's message was its focus on people and families, rather than on power and greed—the basis of the conservative's legislation. Labor's policy stressed improved health, welfare and housing services and facilities, cheaper electricity prices and job creation initiatives. A large amount of Labor's campaign, like the Liberal Party's, centred on accountability and the need for better transparency in government, highlighting the lack of honesty and integrity of the National Party. Some were concerned, however, that Wright was putting too much emphasis on the instability of the conservatives at the expense of economic management issues. Labor hoped its negative campaign would resonate with voters.

In the last weeks of the campaign, the Liberals appeared hapless and suffered a series of embarrassing reversals. As one source reported:

The Liberals for the first time were in the position of having to mobilize a campaign without any of the considerable advantages of political

office. The difficulties facing the Liberals only multiplied, however, over the pre-campaign and campaign periods. The Liberals were dogged by an almost unending series of divisive incidents. Malcolm Fraser's open letter criticizing the Queensland branch and Mr White's behaviour; Mr Sam Doumany's resignation as deputy parliamentary leader, Mr Doumany's subsequent invitation to Tasmanian Liberal Premier, Robin Gray, to campaign on his behalf, though it was also evident that Mr Gray was interested in supporting Mr Bjelke-Petersen and the National Party; the actions of four senior Liberals, all formerly state cabinet ministers, in campaigning as coalition Liberal; the entry into the campaign of former Liberal premiers Sir Henry Bolte and Mr Tom Lewis (in addition to Mr Gray) to support the Nationals; and the undenied report, just six days before polling day, that Mr Brian Austin was planning to challenge Mr White's leadership. Nor was the Liberal campaign assisted by the decision of Dr Edwards to retire from politics, vacating his vulnerable seat of Ipswich. (*AJPH* 1984:vol. 30, no. 1, p. 261)

The wheels had fallen off the Liberal campaign in a big way. Conservative voters were thus given a stark choice: to vote for a strong Premier who could form a single-party majority government or persist with their traditional voting habits and perhaps see the Coalition continue its squabbling.

## **A new watershed: the 1983 state election**

After five successive elections that had produced relatively stable outcomes (those from 1960 to 1972), the seismic shift of 1974 led to a pattern of Coalition electoral dominance that was replicated in 1977 and 1980. The 1983 state election was another such seismic shift in popular opinion, which would have a significant impact for the next six years.

Unlike the 1974 election, which saw the Coalition vote jump by 16.7 per cent, Labor's drop by 11 per cent and the DLP disappear, the 1983 election redistributed votes *among* the former coalition side. In 1983, Labor's vote moved only marginally, finishing slightly ahead of what it had achieved in 1977 as it recovered somewhat after the 1974 rout. On the conservative side, however, the Nationals shanghaied the Liberal vote, capturing an additional 11–12 per cent of the state-wide vote at the expense of the Liberal Party. In short, Queensland Liberal voters transferred their allegiance; they backed the dominant partner in 'their' government.

The 1983 election also had some parallels with the tumultuous events of 1957. Just as the long-term Labor government was falling apart in 1956–57, so the Coalition government had fallen apart in 1982–83 as the Liberal and

National Parties bickered ostensibly over the refusal of the Nationals to agree to establishing a parliamentary public accounts committee (hardly a momentous issue in itself but symbolic of their differences). As in 1957, now the cabinet could not abide working together and sections of the government were prepared to publicly turn their backs on former colleagues. And, again like 1957, now hardened belligerents wanted everything their own way and were unprepared to compromise.

Two things, however, were significantly different between 1957 and 1983. First, the Liberals did not use their numbers to bring down the Nationals' rump government in the Parliament. If the Liberals had had the will or the opportunity to side with Labor to deny confidence to the Nationals, they could have defeated Bjelke-Petersen by 47–35. They did not adopt this tactic, however, even if some countenanced it; and then over the months that the Parliament did not sit it was not a possible course of action. Second, the Nationals' firepower in the 1983 election was formidable. The Nationals had the upper hand from the outset, with superior campaigning skills, bountiful campaign funding from wealthy donors prepared to invest in the longevity of the government and the benefit of electoral boundaries favouring its supporters. As a consequence, the Nationals captured a swathe of new territory in 1983, winning Brisbane electorates they had never held before and that they would awkwardly hold onto until 1989.

The 1983 election outcome was historic: for the first time the National Party won half the seats in the Parliament and with two ministerial defections could govern alone. As the election results began to filter in on the evening of 22 October, it became apparent that a massive swing to the Nationals was occurring. The National Party's vote rose to 38.9 per cent, delivering the party a gain of six seats. Crucially, for the first time, the Nationals achieved a strong result in metropolitan areas, winning six seats in Brisbane (all captured from the Liberals). New members included: from the Brisbane metropolitan area—Yvonne Chapman (Pine Rivers), Leisha Harvey (Greenslopes), Earle Bailey (Toowong), Brian Cahill (Aspley) and Ian Henderson (Mount Gravatt); plus a number of new members who retained National seats, including—Russell Cooper (Roma), Kevin Lingard (Fassifern), Brian Littleproud (Condamine), Sandy McPhie (Toowoomba North), Lyell (Bill) Newton (Caboolture) and Mark Stoneman (Burdekin). In addition, the former Liberal Bill Kaus retained Mansfield for the Nationals, having swapped parties when his preselection as a Liberal was denied.

The Liberals lost two-thirds of their seats, dropping from 22 to eight, and then to just six after the former Liberal ministers Brian Austin and Don Lane defected to the Nationals. To remain in government and maintain stability, the two renegades bargained for their old portfolios of Health and Transport, which the Premier accommodated. Their defection increased the government's majority to four and meant the Nationals could provide the Speaker and still command a majority

of 41–40 on the floor of the Assembly. The six Liberal survivors included: Angus Innes, Bill Knox, Norman Lee, Bill Lickiss, Col Miller and Terry White. Prominent Liberals to lose their seats included: Sam Doumany, Bill Hewitt, Rob Akers, John Greenwood, Terry Gygar, Rosemary Kyburz, John Lockwood, Beryce Nelson, Ian Prentice, Guelfi Scassola and Norman Scott-Young. In Don Lane's (1993:126) terms, 'most of the trendies had been thrown out of their seats by a voting public clearly fed up with the Party that had literally walked out of coalition Government'. Bob Moore, a former senior Liberal who did not secure preselection and jumped to the Nationals in July 1983, also lost his seat. In Callide, Lindsay Hartwig was returned as the sole independent.

Labor's slender increase in its state-wide vote (to 43.98 per cent) resulted in a net gain of seven additional seats, taking Labor's tally to 32—its best result since 1972. Incoming Labor members included: Pat Comben (Windsor), Wayne Goss (Salisbury), David Hamill (Ipswich), Ken McElligott (Townsville), Denis Murphy (Stafford), Bill Price (Mount Isa), Tom Veivers (Ashgrove) and Anne Warner (Kurilpa). All Labor's gains were at the expense of the Liberals except Mount Isa, where Price defeated the Nationals' Angelo Bertoni. New members in seats retained by Labor included: Clem Campbell (Bundaberg) and Keith De Lacy (Cairns). Labor lost one seat, Maryborough, where Brendan Hansen was narrowly defeated by the former Liberal Gil Alison now representing the Nationals.

## Conclusion

The 1983 election confirmed that Joh Bjelke-Petersen was a political phenomenon. The Nationals had crashed through largely thanks to the political astuteness and appeal of Bjelke-Petersen. He had won spectacular victories in the mid-1970s and now repeated the feat in 1983. He had pulled off a most remarkable coup. Along with Sparkes and Evans, he had transformed the rustic old Country Party organisation with narrow sectional interest and a declining electoral base into a modern state-wide party dominated by a broader array of commercial, mining and tourism interests. He had blended the ideologies of parochial 'country-mindedness' and religious puritanism with rampant developmentalism, 'boosterism' and states' rights chauvinism. Certainly, the government and most of the media interpreted the 1983 election as a vindication of his policies to that point: the promotion of opportunistic development while taking a tough stance on opponents and critics.

Yet, despite the elation, not everyone in the National camp was ecstatic. Some senior Nationals in the parliamentary and organisational wings were, for a time, anxious to be rid of Bjelke-Petersen. He had already been Premier for more

than 15 years and had grown dictatorial and belligerent. He was perceived as frustrating the ministerial ambitions of members in the parliamentary party. There were then many senior ministers among the Nationals who held ambitions to become Premier, including Russ Hinze, Bill Gunn and Mike Ahern. Moreover, while Sir Robert Sparkes and Bjelke-Petersen had prospered as a duumvirate in the 1970s, by the early 1980s, their relationship was gradually deteriorating into outright warfare.

To many 'neutral' observers, the fact that the Nationals managed to win government in their own right had its shortcomings. There were now even fewer checks and balances on the Nationals' ministry, fewer differences of opinion that could provide healthy debate inside government and fewer proprieties that had to be seen to be observed. Some in government began to think they were above the law or could legislate to fix anything they chose. With the Premier and his handpicked National ministry freed from the counselling and safeguards provided by the Liberals, the idiosyncratic nature of the government became more pronounced. The question of where to draw the line in decisions or projects the government became involved in would become increasingly problematic. 'Group-think' took over. And as time went on, the 1983 election outcome would prove a curse as well as a blessing for the government.