

15. The implosion of Joh Bjelke-Petersen, 1983–1987

The 1983 election ended the 'constitutional crisis' by providing the Nationals with exactly half the seats in the Parliament (41) and the opportunity to supplement their ministry with Liberal ministerialists who would agree to join the new government. The Premier had a number of options to secure his majority. Many of the surviving former Liberal ministers were not generally regarded as 'anti-coalitionists' in the previous government. The six potential ministerialists who might have been persuaded to change allegiances were: Norm Lee, Bill Lickiss, Brian Austin, Don Lane, Colin Miller and even Bill Knox. According to the *Courier-Mail* (15 July 1983), when two Coalition backbenchers, Bill Kaus and Bob Moore, had quit the Liberals and joined the Nationals in July, two Liberal ministers, Norm Lee and Bill Lickiss, already had indicated they would consider jumping ship. It was almost as if a race to defect was on. The two other Liberals to survive the 1983 poll, Terry White and Angus Innes, would not have been acceptable to the Premier and his senior ministers. In total, six of the eight Liberals had been ministers (although Miller had served for just 13 days after White was sacked and before the resignations of all the Liberals were accepted). Knox had been a minister since 1965 and Lee and Lickiss had been ministers since early 1975. They had some pedigree. Austin and Lane (and White) each had one parliamentary term as minister.

Two Liberals, however, took the issue into their own hands. The day after the election, Austin and Lane had discussed the prospects of defecting and swapping parties, with Austin saying 'I'm sick of this...I reckon we ought to give 'em the arse. What about joining the National Party' (Lane 1993:126). They communicated with the National Party's headquarters, indicating they would change allegiances and provide the government with a workable majority in the Parliament. Both these former ministers had earned a reputation as effective ministers who fought for the government as a whole in the previous term. Bjelke-Petersen also got on personally very well with Austin, who was an effective minister, and he respected Lane's political skills. The Premier immediately invited these Liberal ministerialists to meetings at his offices in the Executive Building. Interestingly, at this juncture, the Premier did not approach his former Deputy Premier, Bill Knox, or for that matter Norm Lee or Bill Lickiss, about joining the new government. Perhaps sensing that the new stand-alone National government needed some astute political heads, Bjelke-Petersen accepted the offer from Austin and Lane, who together by then had about 18 years' parliamentary experience.

So it was that shortly after the election result was clear the new ministry was announced. Bjelke-Petersen's eighth ministry consisted of 18 ministers (again), with both renegade Liberal ministerialists in senior posts and the Premier hanging onto the Treasury portfolio. His deputy, Bill Gunn, was effectively appointed as minister without a portfolio (but assisting with Treasury matters), and for most of the term he had no other departmental responsibilities until he was acting minister for Water Resources in late 1985 and then given Police in February 1986. Of those ministers who had been in the previous ministries (the 1980–83 Coalition ministry or the rump National ministry of late 1983), Val Bird had retired from politics at the election, Angelo Bertoni had narrowly lost his seat of Mount Isa and Tony Elliott (the former Tourism Minister) was dropped entirely. Two new faces were included: Peter McKechnie (the son of the former Country Party minister Henry McKechnie) and the maverick Bob Katter, from the northern electorate of Flinders (the son of Bob Katter senior, federal Country Party member, 1966–90). There were a fair number of dynastic National Party families represented in the new ministry.

The eighth Bjelke-Petersen ministry

The full ministry consisted of

- Premier and Treasurer: Johannes Bjelke-Petersen
- Deputy Premier and Minister Assisting the Treasurer: Bill Gunn
- Minister for Local Government, Main Roads and Racing: Russ Hinze
- Minister for Works and Housing (and Leader of the House): Claude Wharton
- Minister for Mines and Energy: Ivan Gibbs
- Minister for Industry, Small Business and Technology: Mike Ahern
- Minister for Transport: Don Lane
- Minister for Lands: Bill Glasson
- Minister for Health: Brian Austin
- Minister for Education: Lin Powell
- Minister for Water Resources and Maritime Services: John Goleby
- Minister for Primary Industries: Neil Turner
- Minister for Employment and Industrial Affairs: Vince Lester
- Minister for Environment, Valuation and Administrative Services: Martin Tenni
- Minister for Justice and Attorney-General: Nev Harper
- Minister for Welfare Services and Ethnic Affairs: Geoff Muntz
- Minister for Tourism, National Parks, Sport and the Arts: Peter McKechnie

- Minister for Northern Development and Aboriginal and Island Affairs: Bob Katter

Ken Vaughan (ALP, Nudgee), a future minister himself, said of the new line-up that ‘the first thought that ran through my mind when I saw the line-up for Cabinet was that Cabinet would be nothing more than a wood-heap of logs’ (*QPD* 1983:vol. 292, p. 351). Other opposition members were equally dismissive of Bjelke-Petersen’s eighth ministry and the Nationals’ second alone. Ron McLean (ALP, Bulimba) described the cabinet as full of ‘yes men’ who would not stand up to the Premier (*QPD* 1985:vol. 298, p. 3995). Brian Davis (ALP, Brisbane Central) complained that after almost a year Vince Lester had made no speeches in the Parliament in his new portfolio (*QPD* 1984:vol. 296, p. 1940).

The Parliament had to be summoned quickly as the government was in danger of running out of finance as the appropriation bill to grant supply for 1983/84 had been moved before the election but not passed. Hence, the Clerk issued the summons to members informing them the Parliament would sit on 22 November just one month after the election. On the first day, the Premier nominated John Warner (NP, Toowoomba South) for the Speakership—a motion seconded by his deputy, Bill Gunn. A relatively quiet member, Warner had been nine years in the Parliament and was one of the longest serving MPs on the Nationals’ side with uninterrupted service. Don Neal and Ted Row (the latter of whom would become Chairman of Committees) both had slightly longer service and Gil Alison and Bill Kaus had begun their parliamentary careers before Warner, but Alison had lost his seat in 1977 and regained it in 1983 while Kaus had swapped parties before the 1983 election. Tony Elliott had service equal to Warner but was overlooked for the post, even though he had been a minister for three years.

Bjelke-Petersen gave a very curt, five-sentence speech that was intended to support Warner, noting merely that he had represented his electorate since 1974 and served on a procedural committee of the Parliament—the Privileges Committee—and had ‘demonstrated his high regard for the institution of Parliament and all it stands for’ (*QPD* 1983:vol. 292, p. 4). Gunn supported the nomination with an almost identical set of words, adding that Warner had also served as a pilot in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). Efficiency of effort was apparently the watchword of the new Parliament.

The new Liberal leader, the recycled Sir William Knox (inheriting the post after Terry White had resigned following the massive defeat inflicted on the Liberals), chose to nominate Colin Miller for Speaker because of his previous experience as Chairman of Committees, a move seconded by Bill Lickiss. Labor decided to forgo its right to nominate a candidate from its own ranks, preferring instead to back Miller for the role. Wright made a lengthy speech complaining about the political situation, about the Premier’s treatment of the Parliament gagging

debate and avoiding scrutiny and lamenting that the Parliament had met for only 14 days and 10 minutes in almost a year. He labelled the Parliament a farce. Casey followed him, accusing Claude Wharton of renegeing on agreements to improve *Standing Orders* and claiming the Nationals had deliberately misled the Liberal reformers into thinking reforms were under way when in fact they had no intention of going ahead with them. Casey said, with some feeling, 'those Liberal members were like mushrooms; they were deliberately kept in the dark' (QPD 1983:vol. 292, p. 14). A number of contributors to the debate complimented the former Speaker, Sel Muller, on doing a good job as Speaker despite the difficult sessions over which he presided.

After a relatively short debate, the House confirmed Warner's appointment as Speaker by a vote of 42 to 39 with one abstention (probably Lindsay Hartwig). When Ted Row was nominated as Chairman of Committees, the Liberal leader complained that convention dictated Colin Miller from the Liberals should be preferred, but was reminded by Ivan Gibbs that technically the Liberals were not now a recognised party in the Assembly (that is, they had too few members, with just six sitting MLAs). Knox was reminded that these were new times with new conventions applying or, as journalist Quentin Dempster put it a couple of days later in the *Telegraph*, the 'Hayseeds' were able to 'stack the odds' (QPD 1983:vol. 292, p. 40).

Within weeks of the Parliament sitting, however, Warner was having trouble imposing his authority on the House and maintaining order. His immediate deputy, Row, also had difficulty at times keeping order when he was chairing. Minor points of order would blow up out of all proportion and lead to almighty stoushes. Both their rulings were frequently challenged. One such incident occurred in December 1983 when Keith Wright moved a motion of dissent against the Speaker's ruling given on 15 December. Wright was complaining that Wayne Goss had asked for 'untrue' and 'offensive' statements made by the Justice Minister, Nev Harper, to be withdrawn, but the Speaker had refused to accept the point of order. After many accusations and points of order had been thrown across the Chamber, and threats made by the Speaker to 'name' the Labor member, Goss was permitted to make a short personal statement clarifying his position, but Harper was not asked to withdraw. Two sitting days later, the rancorous dissent motion against the Speaker's ruling ranged far and wide over the interpretation and enforcement of *Standing Orders*. The dispute lasted for more than an hour before the motion was ultimately lost; but the incident indicated that the lawyers were beginning to exert their influence on the proceedings of the Chamber. Goss, once referred to as the 'self-proclaimed new turk' (by Sandy McPhie), was fast earning a reputation for his tenacity and his ability to get under the skins of the Nationals' frontbench, but also for his nitpicking focus.

Almost as a footnote to the proceedings, Labor announced its own officials: Keith Wright remained Leader of the Opposition, with Nev Warburton his deputy, Tom Burns the whip, Les Yewdale as secretary and Brian Davis as the Leader of Opposition Business. Within a year, there would be a change in Labor's leadership team with the departure of Wright from state politics. Rather than risk a spill, the Caucus promoted all the existing incumbents up one position, making Warburton leader from 29 August 1984 and bringing in Bill Prest as Leader of Opposition Business in the House. At the outset of the new Parliament, the Liberals confirmed Knox was their new leader, with Lickiss as his deputy and Angus Innes as whip.

Surviving financially in the 'show that goes on here'

For the first time in his parliamentary career, Bjelke-Petersen presented the combined budget documents to the Parliament for approval. On 24 November, he introduced an appropriation bill seeking an authorisation of \$2.345 billion supply to last into January 1984 so that the government did not run out of money before the main budget authorisation was secured. He vehemently denied that the state was running out of money (despite coming very close to doing so because money would have run out by mid-December according to the former Treasurer, Llew Edwards, and even earlier, according to Treasury). Moreover, he lambasted the Leader of the Opposition for having the temerity to suggest during the election campaign that the state was running out of money! He claimed such statements were a form of 'outright deceit' even though he was moving the emergency supply appropriation as he spoke (*QPD* 1983:vol. 292, p. 78). The Opposition Leader, Keith Wright, denied Labor had used scare tactics in the campaign, stating that the government was spending \$340 million a month and fast running out of funds. He claimed that there was 'talk around the Chamber that this Appropriation Bill had to go through today' (*QPD* 1983:vol. 292, p. 115). The bill was passed on the voices about 10.30 pm that same day. After the passage of this temporary measure, the full state budget was brought down on 1 December 1983. The main budget introduced no tax increases, but provided for a range of tax concessions especially in relation to stamp duties on business transactions and stock exchange transfers. Expenditure rose by 15.5 per cent (to \$4.237 billion) even though the Premier projected a balanced outcome. Despite the government claiming it had sufficient funds, it kept the Parliament sitting until 22 December (very late in the year) to pass the budget bills.

During these debates, the Liberal Party confirmed through one of its senior members, Norm Lee, that it would support the Nationals' government at all times on money matters 'unless it did something completely silly' (*QPD* 1983:vol. 292, p. 107). As an experienced minister, Lee also commented that he personally thought it was inadvisable for the Premier to attempt to do both jobs adequately:

I do not envy the Premier, who is now both Premier and Treasurer. What that amounts to is this: he, as Premier, has to look in a mirror and say, 'How do you do, Mr Treasurer?' and that he has to walk over to the other side of the room and, as Treasurer, say, 'How do you do, Mr Premier?' He has a very difficult task ahead of him. No longer can he blame the Treasurer. (*QPD* 1983:vol. 292, p. 734)

After the success of the Commonwealth Games, the executive was planning a further public spectacle. The government heard that hosting the biennial World Expo event (awarded by the International Exposition Committee) was a possibility and that 1988 was available for a bid. The state government began planning to host Expo 88, seeking the Federal Government's support (which was achieved under duplicitous circumstances). Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser, was opposed to providing federal assistance, but while he was absent, the Premier convinced the acting Prime Minister, Doug Anthony (a fellow National), to give Commonwealth approval. Even at this stage, however, there was some misunderstanding in Brisbane about what the Expo event involved, with some senior Nationals and their business associates believing it was a commercial trade fair at which they could sell goods and promote local produce. It was only later after approvals had been given that the government realised Expo was a promotional and cultural event that prohibited sales of goods and for which only an admission charge was acceptable (with a theme of 'Leisure in the Age of Technology'). Labor questioned the Premier and Treasurer's 'often repeated assurances that the 1988 Expo will not cost Queenslanders one cent and that the Expo will be financed from admission fees, rentals and the sales of assets at an enhanced value' (Jim Fouras, in *QPD* 1983:vol. 292, p. 139). The initial planning envisaged that a private company would stage Expo 88 and cover its costs or even make a profit. The Premier gave public assurances that the event would be fully self-funded and claimed that the opposition had been briefed in August 1983 and had raised no objections. He did not disclose, or might not have fully known then, that Expo 88 would break even only by a substantial transfer of valuable land (about \$200 million) from the Crown to the statutory authority responsible for the event (see Chapter 16). Enabling legislation, the Expo '88 Bill, was introduced on 21 December 1983, establishing the Brisbane Exposition and South Bank Redevelopment Authority and declaring the chosen site of Southbank, which was described as a 'rundown, unattractive area'. The Premier also confirmed in the Parliament that Llew Edwards was engaged

to assist in making the official application to the Paris-based International Exposition Committee and to help with initial preparations, undertaking ‘to do the work for nothing’ (*QPD* 1983:vol. 292, p. 499).

By early 1984, the opposition, sensing that Bjelke-Petersen was not entirely comfortable with Treasury matters, began to refer to him as the ‘Premier-cum-Treasurer’ who avoided giving explanations and instead used his time speaking to money bills to wage political attacks. It was clear that on financial and economic matters, Bjelke-Petersen would stick to a tight script—most likely written by the head of Treasury, Leo Hielscher—and would often table more detailed budgetary documentation.

Many members gave their maiden speeches in the short sitting towards the end of 1983. For the first time, two women members moved and seconded the Address-in-Reply debate to the Governor’s speech. Yvonne Chapman (NP, Pine Rivers) lavishly praised the National Party’s record of achievements, stressed the abolition of many taxes and avoidance of others, but presented a wish list of new initiatives her electorate needed. Leisha Harvey (NP, Greenslopes) cited Thomas Jefferson as saying that the ‘only legitimate object of good government’ was ‘the care of human life and happiness’, which she took narrowly to mean freedom of choice and the security of private property. They both spoke of family, freedom and individual enterprise, but also of balancing community needs and social opportunities. Anne Warner (ALP, Kurilpa), one of three female new members (the first time three had been elected in one election), could not resist a few cheap shots under her own heading of ‘more general matters’. She argued that, with Bob Hawke having championed the idea of consensus through the Economic Summit, in the present ‘national mood of consensus, I felt it was necessary to recognise that there should be some common ground between myself and others, including my political opponents and even the Premier’. She reflected ‘after much soul-searching’ that ‘we are both members of minority groups. I am one of three female members of this House, and the Premier—assuming that he voted for his party—is one of a 38 percent minority who did so’ (*QPD* 1983:vol. 292, p. 377). Warner also thanked her campaign directors, one of whom was Di Fingleton, later to head the Magistrate’s Court and subsequently feature as the defendant in a prominent trial.

Keith De Lacy (ALP, Cairns) said he was honoured to be elected to the illustrious Chamber and that he felt ‘a little intimidated, to be participating in the show that goes on here’ (*QPD* 1983:vol. 292, p. 154). He sounded a little overwhelmed by the occasion but quickly adjusted to the cut and thrust of parliamentary politics. Brian Cahill (NP, Aspley), also giving his maiden speech, spoke of having an ‘overwhelming faith and belief in Almighty God and all His powers’, claiming ‘it was our Lord who said “Without Me you can do nothing”’. He also warned that the ALP ‘will not impose their agnosticism on Queensland—certainly not

as long as this Government guides our destinies' (*QPD* 1983:vol. 292, p. 161). David Hamill stated that the Queensland Assembly met infrequently and was 'not one of the most hard-working Chambers in Australia', before turning to the issues of unemployment, electricity and mining. He finished with an attack on Austin and Lane, calling them body-snatchers who were 'selling their own bodies for a reasonable sum to the National party...[in] one of the most cynical political exercises in the history of our State' (*QPD* 1983:vol. 292, pp. 165, 169). Russell Cooper (NP, Roma) revelled in the historic circumstance of the Nationals governing in their own right and committed himself to working in the footsteps of his predecessor, Ken Tomkins, who had campaigned strenuously for the abolition of death duties (apparently many members were keen to associate themselves with this reform, especially in the bush). Pat Comben's (ALP, Windsor) maiden speech celebrated Queensland's long list of democratic reforms dating from the 1890s (Labor governments, adult franchise, one vote, one value in 1910, compulsory voting [!] and the abolition of the 'useless Upper House') before he went on to lament the depletion of animal and plant species. The fundamentalist Christian Ian Henderson, who had captured Mount Gravatt for the Nationals, mentioned all the Ian Hendersons he knew or had been mistaken for, including a snooker champion and a pastor of religion, before confessing his admiration for Vince Lester on his campaign to get toilet doors to open outwards. He also would later complain that 'in this Assembly, we hear from Marxists, feminists, socialists, pragmatists, capitalists, and so on; rarely do we hear the Christian voice in this political forum' (*QPD* 1984:vol. 295, p. 436).

Wayne Goss (ALP, Salisbury) spoke of prison reform, hospitals, high schools, economic planning and 'a more just, fair society'. He thought that the words of US actor James Cagney best described the present government's mentality towards its citizens: 'steal a buck and they put you in jail, steal a million and they call you sir!' (*QPD* 1983:vol. 292, p. 219). Kev Lingard (NP, Fassifern) spoke of growth, inspiration, the family, education, the importance of discipline, welfare dependency, tranquillity and development strains, and the responsibilities of government to govern. The maverick Earle Bailey, the former television Lotto presenter and grandson of Australian Prime Minister Earle Page, who served only one term (1983–86), fumed about local landlords who had become 'avaricious vultures' preying on small businesses. He too favoured 'freedom of the individual' (*QPD* 1983:vol. 292, p. 356), advocated a flat tax scheme, an end to excessive taxation and government borrowing and voluntary voting, complained about the impact of high electricity charges on pensioners and the threatened closure of the Toowong Library.

Many other members (such as Bill Price, Mark Stoneman, Ken McElligott, Clem Campbell, Tom Veivers and Brian Littleproud) used their opening addresses to extol the virtues of their local electorates while seeking accelerated development.

Generally the initial addresses from the new members were of a higher quality and were more substantial than those of their immediate predecessors (and also a little more politically acrimonious). Most were not particularly memorable, with the possible exception of Goss's carefully crafted broadside. Interestingly, most maiden speeches were interrupted by interjections from across the Chamber—contrary to convention—and the Speaker constantly had to remind members of the accepted practice that maiden speeches were heard in silence and without interruption. Such was the atmosphere.

The sudden deaths of two sitting Labor members

The most significant aspect of the Address-in-Reply debate conducted in November 1983 was that Dr Denis Murphy (ALP, Stafford) was unable to make his maiden speech due to severe ill health. Murphy had been diagnosed with cancer and was hospitalised during the last weeks of the campaign, although his illness had been kept secret until it was no longer possible to do so. He attended the Assembly on 22 November to be sworn in after he won his Brisbane seat. He made another appearance on 27 March 1984 specially to attend the condolence motion for his mate, Kev Hooper, who had died suddenly on 9 March 1984, shortly after being re-elected. Murphy had attended with the intention of speaking to the motion of condolence but did not take part in the speeches. He attended for the third and last time on 12 April, for part of the proceedings, the last day of the first session of the forty-fourth Parliament. He did not speak formally in the Parliament and took part in only three votes: one for the Speaker at the opening of the new Parliament; a second time opposing the suspension of a Labor member moved by the Premier; and a third with the opposition over the *Racing and Betting Act*. Despite Murphy's obvious illness, the government refused to 'pair' him for the period of his absences. He died on 21 June 1984, aged just forty-seven. The condolence speeches given by 10 members were effusive in their appreciation of his scholarship and political activism. Peter Beattie (1990:61, 65) later described Murphy as the 'noblest of us all', adding that it was 'ironic indeed that someone who had probably read more parliamentary speeches than any other member would be denied the chance to contribute his own thoughts for permanent enshrinement in Hansard'.

Murphy's death followed by just three months the sudden and quite unexpected death of Labor's forthright advocate Kev Hooper. He died after surgery on 9 March 1984. Many members were clearly distressed at the unexpected news. Keith Wright read from a letter he had received from the family, which spoke of their shock but also mentioned his prodigious work habits as a local member.

The Premier described Hooper as a 'man whose outspoken ways placed him in the public spotlight on very many occasions', who had a 'colourful turn of phrase', noting: 'he had a strong constitution and a sense of humour, qualities that serve politicians well in the cut and thrust of debate and the life we share in this House' (*QPD* 1984:vol. 294, p. 2006). Tom Burns recalled 'comrade' Hooper's last day in the Parliament (6 March, when he asked two questions—one on the TAB and Sir Edward Lyons and the other on the police—and took part in an early division). He said:

On the last day he was here I said to him, 'Nick off, Hoop, and make certain you look after yourself. Don't come back until you are OK'. He said to me, 'Put me down for the hawkers, pawnbrokers and matters of public interest debates next week'. I bet that someone on the government side was going to get it today when the Hawkers Bill and the Pawnbrokers Act Amendment Bill were being debated. (*QPD* 1984:vol. 294, p. 2013)

David Hamill spoke of Hooper's 'well directed barbs' (or his 'loud, whispered interjections'), saying 'although one could say that Kevin sometimes used a howitzer when a pea-shooter may have been the only weapon necessary, his sorties against injustice and corruption endeared him to the hearts of the ordinary people of Queensland' (*QPD* 1984:vol. 294, p. 2011). Beattie recalled Hooper's funeral was well attended with politicians from all parties present. He even mentioned that Russ Hinze attended having said he would 'miss the old bugger'. Beattie (1990:64) described Hooper as 'one of the most under-rated men ever to sit in the Queensland parliament'. Many of Hooper's frequent allegations of official police corruption and official misconduct would later turn out to be proved correct.

The Governor's second opening speech to the Parliament (in August 1984) attracted some controversy because the Governor engaged in some decidedly partisan comments, such as regretting the downgrading of the monarchy, the change in the national anthem without reference to the people, proposals to change the national flag, complaints about the Commonwealth Government attempting to change state responsibilities without recourse to Section 128 of the *Constitution* and changes to the *Citizen Act* removing reference to the monarchy. Parts of the address read like a promotional campaign speech. Keith Wright, in his penultimate speech in the Assembly, criticised the politicisation of the Governor's address, labelling it a 'political document' full of 'platitudes' and 'undiluted Government propaganda which bears little resemblance to the truth' (*QPD* 1984:vol. 295, pp. 156–8). The Deputy Speaker, Ted Row, continually reminded him that he was not permitted to make 'imputations against the

Crown or a representative of the Crown such as the Governor', to which Wright continually responded that if the Governor's speech contained propaganda he was entitled to challenge it without attacking the Governor personally.

Amid much controversy and some public demonstrations by staff, students and members of the public, the University of Queensland awarded the Premier an honorary doctorate in 1986. University staff placed a full-page open letter of protest in the *Courier-Mail* objecting to the University Senate's decision. One of Queensland's most celebrated poets, Judith Wright, returned her own honorary doctorate as a personal protest. In the Parliament, Hamill (a former university staff member) claimed the nomination was railroaded through the University Senate and that the honorary degrees committee did not recommend the award. He claimed:

[T]he Premier of Queensland does not exemplify any of the lofty ideals associated with the University. The only reason for the recommendation being made by the Senate was...that the Premiers of Queensland, at the time of the [university's] 25th anniversary and the 50th anniversary, received an honorary Doctorate of Laws. The Senate could think of no reason other than tradition to give the Premier a Doctorate of Laws. (*QPD* 1985:vol. 298, p. 4820)

Four by-elections in quick succession

Four by-elections were required in 1984–85—three due to the deaths of sitting members and one to a resignation.

Hooper's seat of Archerfield on the southern side of Brisbane was one of Labor's safest seats. Despite the state secretary, Peter Beattie, considering running for the seat, the ALP preselected the secretary of the local Inala branch, Henry Palaszczuk, after an internal tussle. Palaszczuk was comfortably elected at the 19 May 1984 poll, although a swing away from Labor of more than 10 per cent was recorded. Stafford was a more difficult contest. Terry Gygar had finished third to Denis Murphy in the 1983 poll, with Murphy beating the Nationals' Pat Blake by 39 votes. Labor nominated a relatively high-profile candidate, Janine Walker, who was a prominent ABC Radio current affairs presenter in Brisbane. The Nationals ran with Pat Blake again and the Liberals renominated their defeated member, Terry Gygar. At the by-election held on 4 August 1984, Gygar recaptured his old seat in a 'very tight finish'. He outpolled the Nationals' candidate by just 39 votes to finish second (with the Liberals on 27.5 per cent to the Nationals on 27.3 per cent) but then took the seat by 8061 votes to 6907 on a two-party preferred basis (indeed, the Nationals' preferences to the Liberals were very disciplined, with only 3.6 per cent drifting away to Labor). As one

commentator stated at the time, the 'failure by Labor to hold one of its own city seats in a by-election situation [was] particularly damaging to the party's stocks in terms of maintaining political momentum in the lead-up to the 1986 poll' (see *AJPH* 1985:vol. 31, no. 1, p. 305). One consequence of this by-election was that Colin Miller resigned from the Liberal Party, declaring himself an 'independent Liberal', because the party had renominated Gygar for the seat—a person he regarded as one of the chief culprits behind the Coalition collapse in 1983.

The Leader of the Opposition, Keith Wright, announced in late August 1984 that he was standing down from the position and would leave the Parliament later in the year to contest the federal seat of Capricornia at the next federal election (called early by Prime Minister Hawke for 1 December 1984). Poor polling and the loss of Stafford in the earlier by-election had finally convinced Wright to go. Nev Warburton (ALP, Sandgate) replaced him as Leader of the Opposition on 29 August 1984, becoming the sixth leader to face Bjelke-Petersen and the ninth since Labor was consigned to the opposition benches in 1957. In Wright's valedictory speech, he acknowledged the positive influence of Jack Egerton and Tom Burns on his political career and claimed his major achievements were in the areas of consumer and citizen rights. Wright's resignation from the State Parliament (eventually occurring on 5 November) necessitated a further by-election, for the seat of Rockhampton, which was duly held on 16 February 1985 against the backdrop of a state-wide electricity crisis. Although the Nationals ran a creditable campaign (which the Liberals did not contest), Labor's Paul Braddy, a local solicitor, retained the seat comfortably in the two-horse race, with 58.98 per cent of the total vote to 41.02. Braddy's election helped settle Warburton's leadership at a volatile time, while adding to the talent pool Labor was gradually building in the Parliament.

Finally, a fourth by-election proved necessary due to a tragic fatal tractor accident involving the Minister for Water Resources, John Goleby, in September 1985. The by-election for the seat of Redlands presented the government with a challenge to replace the well-known and popular local member and presented Labor with the opportunity of capturing a seat without an incumbent. Seven candidates stood for election on 2 November 1985. The Nationals did not really have an obvious local candidate, so instead chose a local solicitor, Paul Clauson, who joined the party only four days before the preselection was held. He was not a political activist and was apparently chosen because of his television potentiality and his legal background. The Liberals went for a big name, selecting Max Bolte, a local garden centre businessman who was related to the former Victorian Premier Sir Henry Bolte. Labor's preselection was more problematic, with a fiercely fought three-way struggle between Con Sciacca (who had already lost twice before), the state secretary, Peter Beattie, and Ron Pokarier. Sciacca had strong local-branch support and some support

among the party's central executive (the electoral college). Beattie had a high profile in the media but lukewarm support in the local branches and electoral college. He managed to attract only one-third of the local plebiscite votes and did not attract a significant vote from the central college to beat Sciacca. The Nationals' campaign in the by-election was one of pork-barrelling—promising the electorate a new hospital, nursing home, more police and a rail link, but threatening that these would not be forthcoming if the electorate did not vote National. The Labor and Liberal campaigns again focused on accountability and attacks on the government (although Labor's very unpleasant and public, messy preselection battle overshadowed the poll). In the final vote, the novice Paul Clauson won by the narrow margin of 213 votes on a two-party preferred basis, with Sciacca capturing 43.28 per cent of the primary vote to Clauson's 37.21 per cent and Bolte's poor 14.26 per cent. The final result was close only because more than 25 per cent of Bolte's preferences drifted to the Labor candidate. After Labor's loss in the by-election, Terry Gygar said 'poor old Warbie; he is a great guy but he has not got it' (*QPD* 1985:vol. 300, p. 2306). Warburton's standing in the opinion polls fell further after the by-election result, causing much comment in the Assembly.

The Parliament as the 'laughing stock of Australia' — or those in glass houses who always throw stones

Parliament is essentially an adversarial institution, but at times it could work smoothly with some camaraderie shown by political opponents. Such was not the case during the 1983–86 Parliament. Relations between the three party blocks and the 89 members of the Assembly were vitriolic and spiteful. Labor members were particularly angry and vocal, picking on Lane and to some extent Austin, calling them 'scabs', 'defectors' and 'grubs' for siding with the Nationals and calling other Liberals 'invertebrates'. Labor's more forceful attackers included Keith Wright, Bob Gibbs, Tom Burns, Terry Mackenroth, Nev Warburton and increasingly Wayne Goss, Pat Comben, Brian Davis and occasionally David Hamill. Indeed, Hamill was suspended for a week for screaming 'Sieg heil! Sieg heil!' at the Premier (*QPD* 1985:vol. 298, p. 4130), while Warburton claimed the government's behaviour during the forty-fourth Parliament was 'atrocious', stumbling 'from one crisis to another' (*QPD* 1985:vol. 299, p. 19). Government ministers would hit back with their own brand of invective or abuse, or with claims that the Opposition Leader's job was being eyed by any number of rivals. Labor members were accused of being soft on drugs, sympathetic to petty criminals and constantly running political vendettas against the police. Some Labor members were accused of being 'drunks', 'louts' and 'rubbish'. The

government's main protagonists were often Don Lane, Russ Hinze, Bill Gunn and Brian Austin with various backbenchers making occasional contributions, such as Rob Borbidge, Tony Elliott, Kev Lingard or Sandy McPhie, who frequently taunted Labor and called Warburton 'the quiet and ineffectual union trouble-maker' (*QPD* 1984:vol. 295, p. 398). Lane in particular liked goading Goss, whom he described as a 'trick lawyer' who was always 'attempting to make a cute legalistic point' (*QPD* 1984:vol. 294, p. 2030). Government ministers would also continually make interjections and call points of order when opposition spokespeople were speaking so that they ran out of their allotted time for speaking. The Liberals were generally a little more civil, but some of the more calming influence they brought to the Chamber had dissipated as their numbers had declined.

Arguably by the 1980s, the so-called 'gentlemanly' breed of parliamentarians who had sat through the 1960s had all but disappeared and given way to a rougher, more street-smart breed of professional politicians. The Parliament was rapidly developing into a continuing gladiatorial brawl, with members looking for any excuse to bring on a fight. The Speaker warned members constantly about their behaviour and complained that there was often too much commotion and noise made in the Chamber to hear the speeches being made. Members were repeatedly asked to withdraw remarks the other side found offensive or unparliamentary. Allegations that other members were 'lying' were frequently made, requiring a withdrawal because 'lie' was considered unparliamentary, whereas 'untruth', 'mendacious' and 'deceitful' were accepted.

A typical incident occurred in April 1984. Labor's Ed Casey was complaining of the 'great racket' of converting leasehold land into freehold land and had accused the Premier of manipulating land deals and of using public funds to service his own family property. He said the Premier was 'the recipient of one of the first condominiums built on [Hamilton] Island' (*QPD* 1984:vol. 294, p. 2318). The next day, the Premier issued a 'personal explanation' denying as 'blatantly untrue' that he owned any condominiums, then used his 'explanation' to accuse Casey of having taken bribes from the poker machine industry and having 'robbed the public purse' (*QPD* 1984:vol. 294, p. 2398). Keeping the saga going, Casey, the next day, then reported:

Yesterday in this Parliament the Premier used the guise of a personal explanation to make scurrilous accusations against me, the content of which (mainly because of the uproar which existed in the Chamber at the time) I only became aware of through this morning's media. Let me assure this House that his allegations are completely untrue and are clouded by the deep personal hatred that he has displayed towards me since I first entered this Chamber. If I had ever, as alleged by him, 'thieved Government moneys', he failed in his duty as leader of the

Government to prosecute me; hence he is equally guilty of his own charges. People who live in glass houses should never throw stones. (*QPD* 1984:vol. 294, p. 2490)

Members began to make far more ‘personal explanations’, jumping up to seek a correction to slurs or something another member had said of them (Goss frequently availed himself of such statements). For a while, these ‘personal explanations’ were something of a bandwagon. Supposedly these explanations were about correcting the record, but they were used to fling back the mud or make counter-allegations. On a matter of privilege, Mike Ahern complained that both Wright and Goss had made ‘personal explanations’ that had gone beyond the ‘normal’, with the intention of seeking to prosecute quarrels with other members in such explanations. He pointed out, while asking for the Speaker’s clarification, that personal explanations should not seek to become ‘speeches to political matters’ (*QPD* 1984:vol. 294, p. 2513). It was not uncommon for personal explanations to lead to 10 minutes of bickering across the floor, with the various protagonists taking these opportunities to niggle each other while ostensibly defending their good names. On one occasion, Warburton even went so far as to move a want-of-confidence motion in the government purely because the government had used its numbers to refuse to allow Casey to make a personal explanation!

The government began winding back the number of sitting days as a political tactic. The overall number of sitting days dropped in the 1983–86 Parliament to just 143 days (or 46 a year), down from the previous level of between 160 and 200 days over the three sessions. In the 1987–89 Parliament, sitting days were reduced even further, falling to a mere 131 days (or just 43 days a year). Fewer sitting days provided fewer opportunities for the opposition to enjoy parliamentary privilege and receive media coverage under the protection of the Parliament. They also meant, however, that in order to pass legislation, long sitting days were typical especially at the end of sessions when the government wanted to process legislation before a break. For instance, in two sitting weeks in April 1984, the Parliament went well past midnight three times in short succession. The 3 April sitting ended at 12.58 am on 4 April; the 10 April sitting ran until 3.59 am on 11 April; and then the 12 April sitting day finished at 8.43 am the next day, having sat all night. Labor complained bitterly about the lengthy recesses of parliament, within which it argued the executive ran the state without any parliamentary scrutiny. Labor members also complained that ministers were filling question time with lengthy pre-prepared answers to questions on notice, which was a tactic of filibustering designed to ‘totally eat up Question Time’ (*QPD* 1984:vol. 295, p. 258). They resented, too, that supplementary questions had been abolished under sessional orders.

Moreover, after a few relatively quieter parliaments, a large number of members were forced to withdraw (a day suspension) or were suspended in 1983–86. During the three-year period, Labor members on 22 separate occasions were ordered to withdraw from the Chamber—some, such as Bob Gibbs and Bill Prest, on many occasions. This level of expulsions had not been seen since the early 1970s. Further, another six Labor members were suspended for up to 14 days in this Parliament, with Gibbs suspended twice. When the Premier moved to suspend Tom Burns for five days, Burns responded with, ‘why don’t you give me five months you old dill’. The Premier responded with, ‘You’ll get more if you keep going’, to which Burns replied, ‘You haven’t got the guts to do it.’ As the House moved to a division on the expulsion, Burns said: ‘President Marcos ought to come over here to find out how to run his Parliament. You would be able to teach Marcos a few things. This is what they call the Marcos of Queensland rules’ (*QPD* 1986:vol. 302, p. 3600). After calling the Speaker a ‘government stooge’, Burns was duly suspended.

The well-known public administration academic Dr Ken Wiltshire claimed that the Queensland Parliament had become ‘the laughing stock of Australia’. His comment was echoed in the Chamber by Keith De Lacy (*QPD* 1984:vol. 295, p. 209). Perhaps Bjelke-Petersen took heed as, in one of the lighter moments of this Parliament, the Premier was asked whether he had seen the *Gillies Report* (a satirical political comedy show on ABC Television that regularly ran impersonations of the Premier). He replied with a straight face: ‘Yes I do have a copy, but I have not had time to read it yet.’

The opposition began to respond to the government’s tight control of the Assembly by walking out of the Chamber en masse on different occasions (for example, after midnight on 20 March 1985 and again on 17 October 1985), usually in protest over the government’s industrial relations policies or inflammatory comments by the Premier. Labor was particularly incensed over the government’s tough stance in the SEQEB electricity strike (see below). Other sources of concern to the opposition were procedural; it argued that the government was not adhering to its procedural policy of now allowing two full days to study proposed bills before they were debated. A number of bills in 1984 were introduced at the second reading stage and debated the next day with the government suspending *Standing Orders* to enable it to do that. The government’s defence was that the Parliament was ‘extremely busy’, citing that during 34 sitting days 60 pieces of legislation had been enacted (*QPD* 1984:vol. 294, p. 2767).

The government also complained on occasions that the behaviour of the opposition was deteriorating. The Premier complained about the opposition’s conduct, saying that Labor members asked questions ‘but they will not allow Ministers to answer. They subject Ministers to a continual barrage of

interjections' (*QPD* 1984:vol. 296, p. 2487). Labor's anger was motivated by its contention that ministers were refusing to answer questions; although the Speaker, John Warner, ruled that 'the Chair has no control over the contents of an answer given by a Minister, provided it conforms to the rules...an answer to a question cannot be insisted upon if a Minister refuses to answer' (*QPD* 1984:vol. 296, p. 2487).

Budgets and arguments over taxation

The 1984/85 state budget committed total outlays of \$4.645 billion and was described by the Premier as a 'capital works and employment budget' (especially as unemployment in Queensland was about 11 per cent). As was common in this era, the budget proposed no increase in state taxation, but committed an additional \$600 million to capital works (much of which was borrowed under relaxed Loans Council requirements). Crucially, the budget provided for an additional 1155 school teachers, 100 police, 461 hospital staff and '12,000 man years of additional employment directly and 40,000 man years in employment totally' (*QPD* 1984:vol. 295, p. 768). Education spending rose by 15.7 per cent to \$1.072 billion (or about one-quarter of the overall budget); health rose to \$691 million or 16.2 per cent, while the rest of the budget contained many smaller assistance programs and capital spending across departments. The Premier publicly thanked Leo Hielscher, as Under Treasurer, for his sterling efforts in producing the most recent budget. Unlike Sir Gordon Chalk (and earlier Treasurers), however, who would sit through most of the budget debates, Bjelke-Petersen departed from tradition and absented himself from the Chamber for most of the debate.

Labor was not impressed with the budget, labelling it 'a document of deception', 'a political stunt' and the 'greatest con trick that has ever been perpetrated'—terms its members had used to categorise previous ones too! Warburton accused the Premier of attempting to roll three years of capital spending into one year to give the impression that much infrastructural investment was occurring, when he claimed that, of the supposed \$600 million committed, only \$55 million was in fact committed in the present budget year (*QPD* 1984:vol. 295, pp. 804–5). Warburton argued that the budget was not balanced because a 'large proportion of government activity has to be funded through borrowings' (*QPD* 1984:vol. 295, pp. 812–13). For whatever reason, whether it was that the Premier was involved, the 'spin' was excessive or members were better educated and prepared, this budget attracted much more focused debate on the real financial information than previous ones. The budget debates set a new standard of financial scrutiny that was to be continued in the years ahead.

If the government was ever happy to spruik its low-tax credentials, not all its supporters were equally so moved. Sir Roderick Procter, a National Party trustee, publicly attacked the government over its excessive coal freight charges and proposed 20 per cent casino tax, claiming these were the highest rates in the world. He added, 'so much for our so-called low-tax State' (*QPD* 1985:vol. 299, p. 20).

The 1985/86 budget was again framed in difficult circumstances, with the Premier accusing the federal Hawke government of reining in its own deficits by clawing funds back from the states. He thought Queensland had been denied 'many millions of dollars to which it is clearly entitled' (*QPD* 1985:vol. 299, p. 793). In total, the budget committed more than \$5.048 billion in spending—an increase of 10 per cent from the previous budget. The balanced budget continued the capital works injections, spread across education, water infrastructure, hospitals, roads and public buildings. Spending on education amounted to \$1.175 billion and health to almost \$1 billion. Together these two policy areas amounted to 40 per cent of outlays. Transport received \$973 million, and lands, forestry and police another \$271 million. Despite the tough economic times, the Queensland government was expanding spending at a rapid pace, despite the opposition criticising almost every area of spending as inadequate.

The vexatious SEQEB dispute: 'do not test this government's patience and resilience too far...'

The electricity industry came into prominence in 1984–85, triggering a major political dispute between the government and the trade union movement. Electricity in south-east Queensland had been consolidated under a single authority or public enterprise: the South-East Queensland Electricity Board (SEQEB) (previously Brisbane City Council had powered Brisbane). By the mid-1980s, however, the industry was facing commercial pressures, growth strains and industrial unrest.

The government had talked tough on industrial relations for years and was waiting for a chance to 'take on' some of the Labor-aligned unions. Its chance came to confront the powerful Electricity Trades Union (ETU) when the government refused to agree to an increased wage claim from the union and the SEQEB electricians chose to strike and walk off the job, leading to two weeks of power blackouts. Bjelke-Petersen was anxious to 'keep the lights on' and had some opinion-poll support for his stance. He sought to remove the job security of the workers if they continued to strike. The government proclaimed a state of emergency on 7 February 1985 to address the threat to the supply of electricity

and then sacked 1100 union electricians and linesmen. The government then replaced the unionised electricians with non-union private contractors, on new contracts that outlawed strikes.

A marathon parliamentary debate occurred over the SEQEB dispute, going from 11.36 am on 26 February 1985 to 11.30 pm the same day. It was a ferocious debate, as the government's credibility as a tough negotiator was on the line, while on Labor's side one of its staunchest unions was under a concerted attack from the government. Bjelke-Petersen accused the unions of mounting a campaign of 'industrial thuggery, threats and intimidation', claiming that the 'Parliamentary Annexe and the Executive Building were repeatedly evacuated after the receipt of phone calls alleging that bombs had been placed in them' (QPD 1984:vol. 297, p. 3720).

The government prosecuted its case with a vengeance, producing saturation advertising, although interestingly it did not invoke the *Essential Services Act*. Rather, the government chose to introduce three related sets of legislative changes: the Industrial (Commercial Practices) Bill, the Electricity (Continuity of Supply) Bill and amendments to the *Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act*—all in early 1985. The government followed these amendments with a new bill: the Electricity Authorities Industrial Causes Bill, which had four main purposes. These were to: 'Make it clear that strikes are illegal, to abolish compulsory unionism for electricity workers, to set up a separate tribunal to hear disputes in this essential industry, and to provide for summary dismissal or suspension where employees disobey the no-strike provision' (QPD 1985:vol. 298, p. 4213).

Labor accused the government of guillotining all four bills through the Assembly. The *Continuity of Supply Act* was also amended two weeks after it was rushed through the House, to expressly prohibit industrial harassment and give the police wider powers of arrest.

During March 1985, thousands of blackouts and power cuts occurred, exacerbated by big storms and falling trees. The Opposition Leader claimed that the system was at risk of collapse and that much of the infrastructure was either faulty or in need of replacement. The Minister for Energy, Ivan Gibbs, issued a ministerial statement denying the industry was in crisis, but admitting that 2800 blackouts had been registered the previous day. He claimed that most of the homes had power restored within two hours, which he maintained proved 'that the newly appointed SEQEB teams were not inexperienced' (QPD 1985:vol. 298, p. 3826). Disturbances and protests inside Parliament House led the Speaker to order evictions and restrict entry to the public gallery; and on 20 March the Assembly was in lock-down mode, as the doors and gates were locked to prevent protesting unionists from entering the House. Two Labor

MPs, Terry Mackenroth and Anne Warner, were arrested at demonstrations for breaking assembly laws. When a farmers' demonstration took place outside Parliament House in Canberra about the same time, Ed Casey was most pointed when he said Federal Police did not go 'rushing in, grabbing, bashing, kicking and shoving the people and throwing them into paddy-wagons because they were outside Parliament House'—but in Queensland they did (*QPD* 1985:vol. 299, p. 63).

Gibbs accused the ALP, the TLC, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the ETU of using 'guerrilla warfare tactics' and famously threatened:

Let me make it very clear to all members of this House that this Government will not tolerate such behaviour from members of Parliament, members of the Senate [such as George Georges] or any union members, their wives, their families and friends, who try to prevent people going about their lawful business...Let me give fair warning to the members of the Opposition, the Labor Party and unions generally: Do not test this Government's patience and resilience too far or you may well rue the day that you continue to defy the laws of this State. (*QPD* 1985:vol. 298, pp. 4286–7)

Warner defended her right to protest leading to her arrest and responded to taunts she was associating with 'thugs and criminals' by saying 'yesterday morning I was not associating with thugs and criminals. In fact, the only place in which I do that is, perhaps, here, rather than when I am outside with comrades' (*QPD* 1985:vol. 298, p. 4829). Voters had their own say, however, and in March Labor suffered a massive defeat—'one of the biggest landslides ever seen in local government'—on the Gold Coast, leading the Premier to boast that Labor would be devastated in an early poll.

The SEQEB dispute again raised the issue of who was running the state. The government was concerned to end the strike and be seen to be tough on protesters. Labor compared the government actions with the Nazi regime, calling the laws 'Police-State legislation'. When the word 'Nazi' was used, it was sometimes ruled to be offensive and unparliamentary by the Speaker, although the word 'fascist' was acceptable (*QPD* 1985:vol. 298, p. 3995). For Labor, too, the dispute again raised the issue of the 'unfair assembly laws', civil rights and the legitimacy of political protest.

And, as if the confrontation with unions was not enough in itself, the government conducted a series of raids on so-called abortion clinics in May 1985. The raids were intended to close down the emergent abortion clinics, which the government felt were performing abortions too liberally. Police broke into suspected clinics in Brisbane and Townsville 'looking for foetuses' followed

by television crews that had been tipped off by the authorities in order to secure maximum media coverage (*The Age*, 22 May 1985). The Attorney-General, Nev Harper, confirmed that cabinet had decided to close down these ‘factories’ after receiving a petition from the Right to Life organisation in 1984. Two doctors were charged under the criminal code, while Goss protested that the raids had breached doctor–patient confidentiality. The raids were widely perceived as an attack on the rights of women by conservative men.

A litany of allegations

During the entire period of 1984–86, the Parliament was treated to a litany of allegations of corruption, kickbacks and suggestions of misconduct. In the months before his death, John Goleby was accused by Terry Mackenroth and Tom Burns of using his ministerial position to remove a Fraud Squad detective investigating a particularly sensitive case (involving the former businessman and now-bankrupt Frank Luton). Goleby had given a press conference in which he stated he had met Luton on only a few occasions, after which he was peppered with opposition questions. Mackenroth claimed that Goleby had met Luton on many occasions and he invited the businessman to his home for discussions. Mackenroth demanded the minister’s resignation for misleading the Parliament, which was not forthcoming. Goleby made a ministerial statement on 9 October 1984 objecting to the smear campaign, denying the allegations and claiming that the detective had been transferred more than a month before Goleby had become a cabinet minister, but he admitted that he had spoken to police about the matter. The Labor frontbencher, whom Goleby nicknamed ‘Motormouth Muckenroth’, continued to pursue the matter, tabling further documents and calling for a complete investigation. It also transpired that Russ Hinze had met Luton, but he claimed in another ministerial statement that he was not aware the fraudster was under investigation.

Further questions of impropriety were raised about Sir Ted Lyons, who was both a National Party trustee and Chairman of the TAB. He was an inveterate gambler, who bet more than \$700 000 in one year, much of it with the TAB. He had also developed a habit of wagering phone bets with the TAB on credit (that is, they were not backed by cheques received by the agency at the time of the bet), which was contrary to the rules. Burns raised allegations in the House about Lyons’ inappropriate betting. As Racing Minister, Hinze was asked to investigate, which he did, taking the issue to cabinet. There were many other complex business deals and investments that involved Lyons directly or indirectly during this period (see Fitzgerald 1989:96–103; Whitton 1989:100–3), including with Rothwells Bank and Lindeman Island, and all the while the Premier still retained the services of Lyons as a financial adviser throughout 1984. Concerned

by Lyons' credit betting and conflicts of interest, the TAB board, meeting in April 1985, voted by seven to three to recommend the minister remove Lyons as chairman. Lyons initially refused to resign and a cabinet decision on his future was deferred. He resigned from the TAB one week after the board's vote.

In August 1985, Goss raised other issues concerning Hinze's political interference and conflict of interest in granting a TAB betting licence to his own pub, the Oxenford Tavern, through his private company Junefair. Goss claimed that the opposition's case was 'overwhelming' and that 'in any other State, in any other Western democracy, it would be enough to bring down the relevant minister and, possibly, the government of the day' (*QPD* 1985:vol. 299, p. 324). As Hinze tried to ride out the storm, Goss tried to subpoena witness statements on oath from board members. Later, after he had left state politics, Goss recalled that during this episode

I remember one day I was pursuing Russ over an alleged conflict of interest which had arisen. I think I was probably a bit 'suspicious and unfair', but he was the Minister for Racing; he had responsibility for the TAB; he had a tavern at Oxenford the driveway of which the Pacific Highway runs through, and there was a TAB licence to be allocated to Oxenford. It was to go to a newsagent couple, but it was recommended instead to go to the Oxenford Tavern, or adjacent to it. Anyway I was able to produce a document and table it. Russ and I had our respective press conferences and battered each other around the head. I left and walked onto the [parliamentary] veranda out here and I heard a voice call out, 'Hey Gossie'. I turned around and there is Russ lumbering along the veranda. He said, 'Come and have a beer'. This was around 11 o'clock in the morning, which is a little bit early for me, but it seemed like an offer that was too good to refuse. So we wandered into the Strangers' Bar... Anyway, Hinze bought me a beer and he said, 'Listen, why don't you go after some of those other bastards. They are much more corrupt than I am'. I did not know at first what to make of this offer but, usually being fairly quick to spot an opportunity, I said, 'Look I will be in that, Russ, but on one condition'. He said, 'What's that?' I said, 'You have got to provide me with the documents'. He just laughed, had another drink of his beer, and on we went. (Goss 1998)

Again, Hinze tried to brazen it out, claiming he did not seek to influence the decision, but refusing to say whether he had attended the meeting at which the decision was made. Eventually, he would have to return the TAB licence due to such pressure, which he did, after the media ran hot on the issue, in late September 1985.

Occasionally, Liberal members and sometimes even government backbenchers were also motivated to ask questions about alleged corruption, sometimes with a Dorothy-Dixer quality about them. Yvonne Chapman asked Hinze whether taped allegations published in *TheAge* newspaper by journalist Bob Bottom, which concerned efforts to influence a Queensland Turf Club inquiry into race fixing and involving three Queensland knights, was evidence that Queensland was complacent about organised crime. Hinze named the three knights (Sir Jack Egerton, by then the Deputy Mayor of the Gold Coast, Sir James Killen, a former federal minister, and Sir Edward Williams) but said there was no evidence they were involved in organised crime and praised the police for doing a good job (*QPD* 1984:vol. 295, pp. 1017–18).

The Police Commissioner, Terry Lewis, was knighted in 1986, at the Premier's behest, becoming the only serving police officer to be so awarded in Australia. At the time he was knighted, however, he was already falling under suspicion by the new Police Minister, Bill Gunn, who had been informed of allegations of Lewis's corruption and who resented the direct line of communication (and influence) Lewis seemed to have with the Premier.

Ensuring the next win: the Electoral Redistribution Bill 1985

The Nationals were unfettered in the electoral redistribution of 1985. Previously, the Nationals might have paid only token reference to the Liberal Party's concerns in redistribution exercises, but now the governing party was unencumbered by such concerns. This was an opportunity when the Nationals could design a system precisely to suit their interests and enhance their chances of expanding their urban base by capturing Brisbane electorates.

In 1985, Queensland still did not have an independent electoral commission; rather, cabinet selected specially appointed electoral commissioners for each redistribution. Cabinet could dictate many of the framing parameters of the redistribution, such as the number of seats in the Parliament, and stipulating the number of zones. These parameter settings were not arbitrary, but were carefully calculated to maximise the conservative vote and in the 1985 case the number of National Party seats winnable. Cabinet approved the boundaries of the four zones, leaving the boundaries of individual seats to the commissioners. Regional National members advised on their own country seats, which were then coordinated by Sir Robert Sparkes and David Russell QC while Don Lane was entrusted with maximising the National representation in the south-eastern corner of the state. Lane had worked on earlier redistribution exercises (for the Liberal Party) and, by 1985, boasted that Sparkes regarded him as 'something

of an expert on such matters for the south-east zone'. Lane recalled that he worked with a small team on the redistribution for about nine months before the Electoral Districts Bill was introduced to the Parliament, meeting in the National Party's 'bunker'—its headquarters in Spring Hill. He also briefed cabinet on the merits of increasing the number of seats from 82 to 89—four extra for the city and three for the bush (Lane 1993:160; Coaldrake 1989:33).

To constitute the three commissioners, the Premier chose John Andrews, a public servant and Main Roads engineer, Col Pearson, the head of the Justice Department, and Sir Thomas Covacevich, a lawyer from Cairns and a fundraiser for the National Party. Andrews was reportedly 'surprised by the thoroughness of the National Party submission' (Lane 1993:162) and famously told reporters that while the Premier had not sought to influence the outcome, the commissioners were unable to change the distribution of seats between the zones. He claimed that he was just doing his duty under the act, which stipulated the zones and the number of seats that were required in each zone.

The quota for the number of electors per seat in each of the four zones indicated the degree of malapportionment the government insisted on. The metropolitan or south-eastern zone, with 51 seats, had an average enrolment for each seat of 19 357. The provincial cities zone, a series of coastal strips dotted all the way through to Cairns, had 13 seats with a quota of 18 149 electors. The country zone was a long hinterland strip of territory, nestled along the coast but extending some 200–400 kilometres inland, and running almost the length of Queensland from Goondiwindi to Mareeba. It was allocated 17 seats each with a quota of 13 131 voters. The final zone, the western and far northern zone, occupied most of the interior landmass of the state and had a quota of just 9186 for each of its eight seats. City seats, therefore, had twice the number of voters as those in the interior. It was a case, in Coaldrake's (1989:39) words, of 'leaving nothing to chance'.

In the Parliament, Nev Warburton acknowledged that 'no matter how legitimate and constructive the Opposition's objections to this legislation may be, we accept the inevitable. It will be forced through' (*QPD* 1985:vol. 298, p. 5100). Although Labor was not in a position to alter the legislation, Warburton promised his party would establish an independent electoral commission, one quota for the entire state (that is, no weighted zones) and a variance between electorates of only plus or minus 10 per cent. Bill Knox agreed with Warburton, saying that it was 'probably correct for the Leader of the Opposition to say that there is no more important legislation before the House, because it concerns the survival of members of Parliament' (*QPD* 1985:vol. 298, p. 5111). Both sides of the House attempted to cite the electoral authority Professor Colin Hughes to support their case, with Bjelke-Petersen claiming Hughes had stated the electoral system was not biased, while David Hamill quoted Hughes as giving

the opinion that Queensland had the second-worst electoral system in Australia (with Western Australia the worst). The Electoral Districts Bill was passed by the Nationals' numerical superiority after midnight with the Liberals voting with Labor to unsuccessfully oppose the legislation. It was also a telling sign of the low importance attached to Indigenous matters that after the electoral bill was passed, in the early hours of the morning, the House was then required to debate the amendments to the Aboriginal and Torres Straits leaseholding legislation (DOGIT provisions).

Later that year, when a series of further corrections and amendments was made to the *Electoral Districts Act*, due to errors in the initial bill (which were not noticed by government members, including the Deputy Premier, Bill Gunn), Warburton made further claims. He stated:

This electoral legislation was conceived, developed, and honed into its final form by the faceless men at Bjelke-Petersen House under the direction of the National Party's hatchet man, Sir Robert Sparkes. That is where it occurred. This intervention by the National Party organisation is not a case in isolation. In other policy areas the National Party organisation is developing proposed legislation and offering it to Ministers to present to their department, to the Cabinet, and to the Parliament as a *fait accompli*. To the forefront in this regard—apart from Sir Robert Sparkes—is a person named David Russell. With due respect to the Governor in this State, I point out that that gentleman happens to be the son-in-law of Sir Walter Campbell. Clearly, the National Party likes to keep things in the family. (*QPD* 1985:vol. 299, p. 330)

The blatant stacking of the 1985 redistribution came in for some direct criticism in the subsequent Fitzgerald Inquiry and was referred to explicitly in the inquiry's report. Fitzgerald argued:

The fairness of the electoral process in Queensland is widely questioned. The concerns which are most often stated focus broadly upon the electoral boundaries, which are seen as distorted in favour of the present Government, so as to allow it to retain power with minority support. Irrespective of the correctness or otherwise of this view, the dissatisfaction which is expressed is magnified by the system under which electoral boundaries are determined. It has not always been obvious that the Electoral Commissioners were independent of the Government. Submissions and other material upon which the Commissioners have proceeded have been secret. The Commissioners did not report to Parliament, but to the Premier. (Fitzgerald 1989:127)

Mysteriously, the National Party submission to the Electoral Redistribution Commission subsequently went missing and has never reappeared. There were many rumours circulating in Brisbane that the last copy was shredded in the Premier's Department some time in the late 1980s, before Wayne Goss was sworn in as Premier on 7 December 1989.

New governor and changes to the ministry: more than a tinker at the edges

In August 1984, the Premier informed the Parliament that the Governor had approved the addition of 'Youth' to Geoff Muntz's portfolio responsibilities, but no other restructuring of the ministry occurred at this time. After the death of John Goleby in September 1985, however, more changes were needed. Bill Gunn was appointed as the Acting Minister for Water Resources and Marine, serving between September and early February 1986. Meanwhile, in July 1985, a new Governor was appointed. Having been overruled in his first choice for the Chief Justice, the Premier decided to promote the compromise candidate for the Chief Justice position, Sir Walter Campbell, to the post of Governor, thereby creating a further vacancy on the Supreme Court. Wally Campbell was selected as Governor from the bench, which was not an unusual pedigree given many chief justices had served as the Administrator in the absence of a Governor, but he was an unusual choice in the sense that he had an understanding of politics and, although he had some family connections with the Nationals, he had an independence of mind. Campbell performed his first public duty by opening the third session of the forty-fourth Parliament on 20 August 1985. After his forced departure from politics in late 1987, Bjelke-Petersen would say the 'only thing' he regretted doing was appointing Campbell to the Governorship (Wear 2002:125).

Shortly after Campbell's elevation to Governor, Bjelke-Petersen surprised many when he embraced the *Australia Acts* in State Parliament. These acts, negotiated between the Commonwealth and state governments and the British government, removed the final constitutional links between Britain and Australia. Australia had repatriated its own constitution. The acts removed legal appeals to the UK Privy Council. Despite the seemingly republican motivation of these acts, the Premier said 'taken as a whole...I commend the package' to the House (*QPD* 1985:vol. 300, p. 1500). Bill Knox, a former Attorney-General, said he never thought he would see the day when the National Party would present such legislation favourably.

A more significant reshuffle was unveiled to the ministry in February 1986. Responsibility for police matters was moved from Bill Glasson to Gunn, and

Mapping and Surveying were formally added to Glasson's portfolio of Lands and Forestry. Martin Tenni was moved from Environment to Water Resources and Maritime Services, and his former portfolio of Environment, Valuation and Administrative Services was broken up, with Environment given to Brian Austin, who became Minister for Health and Environment. Geoff Muntz swapped Welfare Services, Youth and Ethnic Affairs for Corrective Services, Administrative Services and Valuation. Bob Katter was given additional responsibility for Community Services, along with his Northern Development and Aboriginal and Island Affairs portfolio. And, Yvonne Chapman, an experienced local councillor who had been in the Parliament for just more than two years, was elevated to the cabinet—the first woman cabinet member appointed in Queensland. She became Minister for Welfare Services, Youth and Ethnic Affairs from 6 February 1986. An avid supporter of the Premier, she would serve as a minister for the remainder of the life of the Bjelke-Petersen-led government, but not under Mike Ahern in either of his two ministries. She would return to the ministry in September 1989 in the dying days of the National Party administration in the short-lived ministry of Russell Cooper.

Mr Speaker Warner's last stand

Before the 1986 election, the Speaker, John Warner, indicated he would not be recontesting his seat and as a consequence would serve just the one term as Speaker. He had had a fairly torrid time as Speaker and had been humiliated when he was publicly criticised by the Premier for not being up to the job. Many Speakers of the Queensland Parliament had hides thicker than rhinoceroses; Warner did not. He had made many peculiar or incorrect rulings on divisions and over which motions were being debated (see, for example, *QPD* 1984:vol. 296, p. 1678, and vol. 297, p. 2989). As Speaker, he appeared uncertain and too ready to change his mind on different rulings, and kept getting members mixed up, sometimes appointing the wrong members to act as tellers in divisional votes (that is, when they were voting the other way). He had also struggled to bring opposition members to order and was accused of not being even-handed to their main spokespeople. On one occasion in question time, the federal National Party leader's comments that Labor policies were responsible for the AIDS epidemic led to pandemonium breaking out, with the Speaker unable to control the heated emotions (see, for example, *QPD* 1984:vol. 297, pp. 2888–902). It was claimed that National members were publicly suggesting that Warner was not up to the job and that at least two ministers were lobbying to have him replaced. Labor's Bob Gibbs also called on Warner to resign for acting incorrectly and unfairly. In one mind-boggling incident in November 1985, the Labor opposition asked for leave to move a motion suggesting the Speaker *enjoyed* the confidence of the

House (!) and supported this with their 'ayes' only for the government to defeat the bid with their 'noes'. In the resulting division, the government prevented the opposition from debating its confidence in the Speaker by a vote of 42 to 38—hypocrisy in the extreme!

A few years later, after Warner's death in 1991, Tom Burns recalled the difficult times Warner had experienced in chairing the Assembly compared with his predecessors. Burns stated that by the time Warner came to occupy the chair, Bjelke-Petersen had come to expect that the Speaker of the day would follow closely his instructions. Burns continued:

John Warner was a quiet and gentle man. The way in which he attempted to handle this Parliament provided a bit of respite following the Speakers who had preceded him in this place. I entered this Parliament at the end of the Nicholson era. Dave Nicholson attempted to get rid of Joh. Three or four others, including Jim Houghton, were involved. That was a fairly prickly mob...However, in the chair, Dave was a fairly tough master. Bill Lonergan followed Dave as Speaker. Of course, Bill got up against the numbers in this place. He was also a prickly character. The next Speaker was Jim Houghton, who had been defeated by Bill Lonergan. Jim had been an Independent member, a Liberal Party member, a Country Party member and a National Party member—a real rebel in his own way. He turned out to be a good Speaker. The next Speaker was Sel Muller, who began on the wrong foot by stating that his loyalty was to the Government, not to the House. He also was a bit of a rebel. Then came John Warner, who was gentle and kind. As the Premier rightly said, he was the type of person who would find it very difficult to be a tough Speaker. The position of Speaker aged John considerably. At times, he found it very hard to be the Speaker in this place. Sometimes, I was disappointed with what happened in this place. I admit that I was never the best behaved person in Opposition, and I am sure that John would accept that admission today. In 1985 or 1986, a Premier's announcement appeared on the front page of the newspapers that John was not up to doing the job. I did not believe that it was necessary for that announcement to be made. It was not fair, and I said so to John and also to Joh. This place can be very hard. (*QPD* 1991:vol. 319, p. 897)

This somewhat sympathetic pen-portrait of Warner from one of his political opponents is one of the few comparative assessments of Speakers made by a long-serving member of the Assembly, able to not only reflect back over time but understand the context.

The 1986 election: Don's party or a chance to conquer Australia?

The 1986 election was another fiercely fought contest. The National Party was sitting on a slender majority and occupying electoral territory it never thought it would control. With a replenished team, Labor thought it was becoming competitive and could win; it was hoping a 'correction' to the aberrant result of 1983 would see it take ground from the Nationals. Meanwhile, the Liberals, with effectively five sitting members (after Col Miller had declared himself an independent Liberal), were anxious to regain their lost territory.

The 1986 result showed, however, that 1983 was no one-off aberration. In the enlarged Parliament, the Nationals increased their seats from 43 to 49, providing them with a comfortable majority of nine on the floor of the Assembly. The government increased its primary vote to 39.64 per cent (up by nearly 1 per cent). New National members included: Clive Berghofer (Toowoomba South), Tony Burreket (Townsville), Huan Fraser (Springwood), Leo Gately (Currumbin), Tom Gilmore (Tablelands), Denis Hinton (Broadsound), Di McCauley (Callide), Tom Hynd (Nerang), Craig Sherrin (Mansfield), Doug Slack (Burnett) and Howard Hobbs (Warrego), who replaced the Primary Industries Minister, Neil Turner, who had chosen at that stage to retire from politics. Labor went backwards, losing two seats net (from the 1983 result) but because they had previously lost Stafford to the Liberals the real loss was one seat in 1986. Their primary vote fell by 2.5 per cent, dropping down to 41.35 per cent. Two sitting Labor members were defeated, in Ashgrove and Mount Isa. Labor's new members included: Len Ardill (Salisbury), Ken Hayward (Caboolture), Ken Smyth (Bowen) and Dean Wells (Murrumba). The Liberals won two seats net over their 1983 result (but four if the defections of 1983 were counted as Nationals). Four fresh faces joined the Liberal Party room, taking its total to 10. Denver Beanland won Toowong, defeating Earle Bailey. Peter Beard defeated Labor's Bill Price in Mount Isa. Alan Sherlock defeated Labor's Tom Veivers in Ashgrove. And, the little-known Lyle Schuntner held Mount Coot-tha (Bill Lickiss's old seat) for the Liberals. Interestingly, Beard, Sherlock and Schuntner would each serve for only one term, as would five Nationals: Burreket, Fraser, Gately, Hinton and Sherrin.

The result in terms of seats proved a vindication of the careful planning undertaken by the Nationals led by Sparkes and Lane in the redistribution process. Of the 51 seats in the south-eastern zone, the Nationals won 23 to Labor's 19, with nine going to the Liberals. In the 17-seat country zone, the Nationals won 15 to Labor's two. In the western and far northern zone, the Nationals captured six of the eight seats (with one each falling to the Labor and Liberal Parties). And in the provincial cities zone, with 13 seats in total, the

Nationals won five to Labor's eight. The fact that the Nationals could extract 23 seats from the south-eastern corner of the state largely enabled them to form government in their own right again.

Of the new seats created at the 1985 redistribution, the Nationals won Springwood (Huan Fraser), Broadsound (Denis Hinton), Glasshouse (Bill Newton), Currumbin (Leo Gately), Nerang (Tom Hynd) and Nicklin (Brian Austin). Austin moved to the Sunshine Coast seat after his Brisbane seat of Wavell was abolished. Labor captured Thuringowa (Ken McElligott), Bowen (Ken Smyth), Logan (Wayne Goss), Manly (Eric Shaw) and Townsville East (Geoff Smith); all except Smyth were sitting members. The new seat of Moggill was won by the long-serving Bill Lickiss, who had followed most of his former electorate into the new seat. The one bright note for Labor was that it captured Caboolture (Ken Hayward), vacated by Bill Newton, who moved to the new seat of Glasshouse. Don Lane, contesting Merthyr as a National, narrowly held onto the seat with the result not being confirmed for three weeks after the election. Di McCauley won Callide, returning it to Nationals' hands (it had been held by the independent Lindsay Hartwig). The former Liberal Beryce Nelson returned to the Assembly, this time representing the Nationals in Aspley. For the first time in six years, there were no independents in the House.

Again, as with the previous election, a large influx of new blood entered the Parliament. Twenty new members were elected (although Nelson had previously served for one term). This brought the number of members who were either new or had served for only one term to 44 of the 89-member Assembly.

Most of the election had been fought on predictable themes. The Nationals had championed economic growth and development, saving Queensland from the Hawke socialists in Canberra and internally from anti-Queensland critics and anti-growth advocates. They used a slogan very similar to the one coined for the 1983 election, but this time it was crisper: 'Queensland—there's never been a greater need.' The campaign posters with Bjelke-Petersen and the map of Queensland were recycled for this election. Television ads also showed a fatherly Premier with two of his grandchildren running into his outstretched arms through paddocks of daisies. The background voice-over told viewers that Bjelke-Petersen was a father to Queensland and 'had an undying love for the State and its people' (*Australian Financial Review*, 14 October 1986). When asked about the quasi-religious nature of the Nationals' campaign, and some religious eulogising about the Premier in song, Bjelke-Petersen simply stated: 'I'm just an ordinary sinner like everyone else' (*Courier-Mail*, 15 October 1986). At the grassroots level, hundreds of local and provincial projects were announced: road and rail improvements, local dams, tourism projects and hotel complexes, more schools and hospitals. Pork-barrelling was alive and well.

Labor emphasised the issues of corruption and maladministration and there is some evidence the issue was beginning to resonate with voters (see Whip et al. 1991:70–1). Warburton spoke of the ‘little mates’ network of corruption in government and the economy (*Australian Financial Review*, 6 October 1986). He pushed the notion of himself as ‘Honest Nev’, who would make Queensland respected and accountable; he was the ‘Honest Choice for Queensland’. He promised to install a range of watchdog machinery that was ‘standard in other States’, including ‘a functional review inquiry, cabinet subcommittees on economics and priorities, planning and strategy, program and capital budgeting, and parliamentary public accounts, public works and public body committees’ (*Australian Financial Review*, 6 October 1986). One television advertisement depicted a number of cheques passing through a bank teller’s window while a narrator’s voice said ‘there’s an awful lot of money changing hands in Queensland these days that really shouldn’t be’. This advertisement was, however, stopped by legal action from Allen Callaghan, who at the time was facing trial for embezzling government funds (from the Queensland Film Corporation) and who argued that such ads would prejudice his forthcoming trial. In another election stunt, Peter Beattie and the ALP’s state president, Ian McLean, signed a public document in front of a large media contingent calling for urgent electoral redistribution, with obvious spaces left for Liberal endorsement. The Liberals’ leader, Bill Knox, claimed this was just another bit of Labor’s ‘gimmicky garbage’ (*Australian Financial Review*, 8 October 1986).

The Liberals in their own way also stressed accountability, using as their slogan the single word ‘Trust’ to emphasise their commitment to good government. Knox stated that he would not be making ‘pie in the sky election promises’. He tried to differentiate himself from the Nationals and their cronyism, playing down the fact that the Liberals had shared the cabinet table with their former colleagues. He committed the Liberals to abolishing payroll tax altogether. Commenting on the circumstances the Liberals were in, he said the ‘blowtorch of reality has hardened the party’ after the devastating loss suffered in 1983 (*Courier-Mail*, 13 October 1986).

The final weeks of the campaign became a little bizarre when Sir Roderick Procter (a long-term National Party trustee) appeared on a current affairs program (the *Carlton Walsh Report*) and argued that ‘the party’s return to power would have adverse effects on business and the State economy’, suggesting the ‘government’s tendering procedures, when employed, were often a charade’ (*Australian Financial Review*, 23 October 1986). In response, the Premier stated that he ‘would seek another election after November 1st if a National Party government was not elected’. His craving for executive power and disregard for democratic expression led Knox to describe the Premier’s statement as ‘absolutely crazy...no matter what happens on November 1st, there is no need

for another election'. Knox added that 'despite all the talk we have been hearing recently, no political party owns the government of the State' (*Courier-Mail*, 21 October 1986).

The Nationals' campaign theme of continuity and state paternalism was an effective message with the electorate. Even if corny, the Nationals' message resonated with voters. The attempts by Labor and the Liberals to discredit the Nationals' record in government fell flat and the electoral gains by the Liberals were minimal whereas Labor's stocks were reversed. After 26 years in opposition, Labor must have wondered how it could ever make headway. To Labor's supporters, the election night was a rerun of David Williamson's play *Don's Party*, in which a group of drunken Labor supporters initially believes Labor is going to win when early results come in, but is devastated when the conservatives are returned as the final figures are counted. In claiming victory and thanking Queensland, Bjelke-Petersen declared he would take on Canberra and rid Australia of the Hawke 'socialist' government.

Bjelke-Petersen's ninth and final ministry

In December 1986, the new ministry was announced. There were relatively few changes. Claude Wharton had retired from politics, as had Neil Turner after serving for one term as Primary Industries Minister (and a short term as Transport Minister when the Coalition collapsed). The two vacancies were occupied by Don Neal (NP, Balonne), who was appointed Minister for Corrective Services, Administrative Services and Valuation, and the Redlands solicitor Paul Clauson, who became Minister for Justice and Attorney-General (the only Attorney-General under either the Nicklin or Bjelke-Petersen governments to hold a law degree). Clauson was later nicknamed 'Silent Paul' because he asked but two questions and made about one and a half speeches in his two years as a backbencher (*QPD* 1987:vol. 307, p. 4813). Responsibility for the relatively small Arts portfolio was moved from the Tourism Minister to the Minister for Mines, Energy and the Arts, Brian Austin.

The ninth ministry consisted of

- Premier and Treasurer: Johannes Bjelke-Petersen
- Deputy Premier and Minister Assisting the Treasurer and Minister for Police: Bill Gunn
- Minister for Local Government, Main Roads and Racing: Russ Hinze
- Minister for Works and Housing: Ivan Gibbs
- Minister for Mines, Energy and the Arts: Brian Austin

- Minister for Industry and Technology: Peter McKechnie
- Minister for Transport: Don Lane
- Minister for Lands, Forestry, Mapping and Surveying: Bill Glasson
- Minister for Health and the Environment: Mike Ahern
- Minister for Education: Lin Powell
- Minister for Primary Industries: Nev Harper
- Minister for Small Business, Employment and Industrial Affairs: Vince Lester
- Minister for Water Resources and Maritime Services: Martin Tenni
- Minister for Justice and Attorney-General: Paul Clauson
- Minister for Corrective Services, Administrative Services and Valuation: Don Neal
- Minister for Tourism, National Parks and Sport: Geoff Muntz
- Minister for Northern Development and Community Services: Bob Katter
- Minister for Family Services, Youth and Ethnic Affairs: Yvonne Chapman

There would be no changes to this ministry until the political crisis that erupted in late November 1987.

When the Parliament resumed, Bjelke-Petersen nominated 'his man', Kev Lingard, as the new Speaker, seconded by Bill Gunn. Both the Labor and Liberal Parties again nominated their own candidates to contest the election, with Labor opting to support their Leader of Opposition Business in the House, Bill Prest (to spontaneous laughter across the House), while the Liberals nominated the former minister Bill Lickiss. Nev Warburton claimed, somewhat facetiously, that the Parliament should be voting for Bjelke-Petersen to become Speaker, because he was moving on—after he had indicated he was going to resign to fight for a federal seat in the 'Joh for PM' campaign (see below). Labor also spoke of the responsibilities of the office of Speaker and the real challenges facing the new Speaker to enable the Assembly to operate more effectively. After the normal tirade of abuse and personal attacks across the floor, Lingard was elected as Speaker with 46 votes, to 30 for Prest and 10 for Lickiss, with three members voting informally. Lingard said that when 'I took my position in this House as a back-bench member, I did not dare to think that three year's later I would be given the great honour of being elected as your Speaker' (*QPD* 1987:vol. 304, p. 34).

The Bjelke-Petersen edifice begins to crumble: Joh for PM, friends fall out, mates in jail

During 1987, the Bjelke-Petersen government began to implode, due largely to circumstances of its own making. At the height of his power, the Premier's iron grip on power began to falter and his usual political acumen was overtaken by hubris. As one study of his leadership has noted, after seven consecutive election wins 'the septuagenarian Bjelke-Petersen succumbed to a kind of manic grandiosity that climaxed in the delusory and self-destructive "Joh for PM" campaign' (Strangio 2008:242). This was to be the Premier's last 'bushfire' in Australian politics.

The Premier helped initiate and was then courted by the 'Joh for PM' campaign that went barnstorming around Australia in the early months of 1987, capturing enormous media attention in the lead-up to the federal election. The campaign originated from the ambitions of maverick business leaders disillusioned with the Hawke government and with the lack of outright opposition to it. Bjelke-Petersen's role in the campaign and leadership of the anti-Hawke forces were planned well before the 1986 state poll. The Premier's boast in his election-night victory speech that he would rid Queensland and Australia of the Hawke 'socialist' government further fed into the intrigue.

'I love Queensland, I love it immensely, the people immensely. I have dedicated over half my life to it. But in this last period, I want to do something for the whole of Australia. I want to get Australia going the right way,' he said (February 1987, cited in *ABC News Online*, 23 April 2005).

The adventurous campaign was fanned and funded largely by Gold Coast developers, such as Mike Gore, who was part of the so-called 'white-shoe brigade'. These developers saw in the ageing Premier a right-wing ideologue who was particularly pro-private enterprise (certainly very much pro-their enterprises). Gore was assisted by a string of other business entrepreneurs such as Ted Lyons, Lang Hancock, Kerry Packer, John Leard, Charles Copeman, Andrew Hay and Ian McLachlan, as well as diverse other fringe New Right characters such as the former Commonwealth Treasury head John Stone and academics Katherine West and Geoffrey Blainey.

If 'Canberra Joh' had chosen to run for federal office, he would, of course, have had to resign from State Parliament (and the Premiership). It is not clear from the unfolding events when he realised that this would be the certain consequence. The national media was obsessed by the campaign, speculating whether he would go through with it and manage to form his own government federally. John Howard and Ian Sinclair were both opposed to Bjelke-Petersen's

destabilising tilt at national leadership. In Queensland, however, some political supporters such as Russ Hinze were pushing the Premier to opt for federal politics, principally so that he could succeed him as Premier. Consequently, until late May 1987, it appeared certain that Bjelke-Petersen would choose to fight his now renamed (and less ambitious) 'Joh for Canberra' campaign. Indeed, he confirmed from Los Angeles on 28 May that he intended to nominate for a seat after Hawke sprang an early federal election.

Sir Robert Sparkes was not, however, a convert to the 'Joh for Canberra' push. He had reluctantly agreed to head the campaign but had reservations about the wisdom of the populist push. There were too many uncertainties: how could Bjelke-Petersen become prime minister, would the federal Nationals accept him as leader, would the Liberals stand aside, and could the divided conservatives win the 1987 election? According to Barlow and Corkery (2007:11):

The Joh push floundered on a lack of money, grassroots organisation, and time. Sir Robert Sparkes, the National Party's Queensland president, realised the state branch's drive into Labor and Liberal suburban territory would require massive financial and human resources. The Federal, New South Wales and Victorian National Party organisations were not on side. They had always been junior coalition partners. Despite changing their name from Country Party to National, they were the party of the bush. The federal party already had a leader in Ian Sinclair, who was not prepared to vanish into the ether. The Joh push disintegrated.

Bob Hawke comfortably won the 1987 federal election with a 24-seat majority and with 45.8 per cent of the primary vote. The Liberal vote went backwards by 0.1 per cent, while the Nationals' vote increased by just 0.9 per cent. John Howard forever blamed Bjelke-Petersen for robbing him of a potential Coalition victory.

On the local front, a by-election was required for the Gold Coast seat of Southport after Doug Jennings died of a heart attack in the sauna of the Parliament and was found on the morning of 9 April 1987. His death was reported that morning to the Assembly by the Speaker, Kev Lingard. Jennings had served for six and a half years in the Queensland Parliament as a National (after serving one term in the Victorian Assembly as a Liberal), but had not risen to the ministry or occupied any senior parliamentary position. Five candidates contested the by-election held on 20 June 1987, with the three main parties each standing candidates along with two independents. The seat had been a Country/National seat for most of its history since its inception in 1950, but the Liberals (Peter White) had held it for one term between 1977 and 1980, so felt that they could recapture the coastal seat with a decent candidate. The Liberals considered they would benefit from the disarray caused by the distracting 'Joh for PM'

campaign that had captivated Australian politics for a while but had by then disintegrated. The Liberals nominated a Gold Coast alderman, Keith Thompson, while Labor ran with Robert Lee without much hope of success. To hold their seat, the Nationals chose a local celebrity and former international rugby league player, Mick Veivers, an acknowledged strong supporter of Bjelke-Petersen. Although the Liberal and Labor Parties attempted to fight the campaign on state-wide issues, it focused mainly on local concerns. In the end, despite the mounting controversies facing the Nationals, Veivers managed to win the seat with a small swing of less than 5 per cent against the government.

Mike Gore had been accused of improperly receiving government loan funds under the *Statutory Bodies Financial Arrangements Act*, which was established to consolidate loans and borrowings to statutory authorities (electricity bodies, local governments), not Gold Coast entrepreneurs. The Opposition Leader, Nev Warburton, ran a public campaign to discredit this arrangement, at one stage calling for the Governor to sack the Bjelke-Petersen government for behaving unlawfully; whether or not he contacted the Governor with this request, nothing eventuated.

Criminal proceedings were also beginning to catch up with close supporters of the Premier. In April 1987, Allen Callaghan—widely seen as the svengali behind the Premier—was jailed for four years for misappropriating public funds. He had ceased his job as the Premier's media adviser in 1979 and been appointed as deputy director of Culture, National Parks and Recreation, as well as chairman of the Queensland Film Corporation (from 1979), and then as the Under Secretary of the Department of Arts, National Parks and Sport from 1984. He was also appointed as a member of the Queensland Day Committee, on which his wife had served as the executive officer since 1981. While Callaghan was chairman of the Queensland Film Corporation, he had spent some \$43 000 on his daughter's wedding from his government credit card. The predicament of Callaghan, as a prominent adviser to Bjelke-Petersen, attracted much continuing commentary in the Parliament with the Premier resolutely defending his former media minder and confidant. The Callaghans were accused of many things in the Assembly, including taking overseas holidays at the taxpayers' expense. Judith Callaghan was jailed, in 1986, for two and a half years for misappropriating public monies 'deceitfully acquired' belonging to the Queensland Day Committee. She was released on health grounds after three months.

The Fitzgerald Inquiry: a window of opportunity

The Fitzgerald Inquiry was a pivotal investigation for Queensland, which changed forever the political culture and institutional landscape. Yet its origins and initial developments were almost accidental or totally fortuitous—and these factors would shape the evolution and impact of the royal commission. The context of the Fitzgerald Inquiry is well known and retold in the *Fitzgerald Report* (1989:Chs 1, 2). Allegations of police corruption had circulated for decades and had been a staple diet of the Parliament over particular sessions. Allegations again surfaced, but this time generated by the investigative reporting of Phil Dickie (at the *Courier-Mail*) and later Chris Masters (ABC TV's *Four Corners*). When *Four Corners* broadcast 'The Moonlight State' documentary that exposed open police tolerance of brothels, illegal betting and carried serious allegations of police corruption, the government chose to act. Fortuitously, with Bjelke-Petersen out of the state stoking up his 'Joh for PM' campaign, Deputy Premier, Bill Gunn (who was also Police Minister), took the decision to establish an inquiry. He did it partly to get to the bottom of the allegations once and for all, but also to show he had the mental toughness and decision-making acumen of a potential leader as part of his plan to succeed Bjelke-Petersen as Premier (Davis and Wanna 1988:80–1). After he made the decision to establish a royal commission, he initially considered appointing the head of the Police Complaints Tribunal, Judge Eric Pratt, to head up the inquiry, thinking it would be over in six or seven weeks. Legal advisers close to the government scoffed at this proposal and when Gunn asked who should head the inquiry, the name of Tony Fitzgerald QC was suggested as an independent and 'fearless' prosecutor then practising in New South Wales. Gunn accepted this advice and appointed Fitzgerald, but restricted the terms of reference to the allegations (and individuals named in the *Four Corners* program).

The original terms of reference were issued on 26 May by special *Gazette*, empowering Fitzgerald to 'make a full and careful inquiry' into the activities of the alleged crime bosses: the Bellino family (Gerald, Antonio and Vincenzo), Vittorio Conte and Hector Hapeta; to investigate whether these people were involved in operating prostitution, unlawful gambling or illegal drugs; to investigate whether police had been guilty of misconduct or violation of duty in policing such activities; and to investigate whether any person on behalf of any of the alleged crime bosses directly or indirectly provided benefit (financial or otherwise) to any member of the police force. Fitzgerald was asked particularly to investigate whether any of the crime bosses had made a payment of \$50 000 to

a political party and whether a party had received such funds from this source. He was also empowered to review previous conduct of former serving members of the force.

The original inquiry was intended as a quick six-week investigation into claims of police misconduct and criminal activity, to clear the air and get embarrassing stories of corruption and prostitution off the front pages. It did the very opposite. The royal commission, supported by a team of dedicated investigators, morphed into a full-blown inquiry that brought down a corrupt police commissioner, exposed the dishonest networks of graft run by the so-called 'rat pack' senior officers and eventually led to the adoption of a raft of administrative laws and a substantial change in the electoral laws of the state. It also spawned both an independent standing Crime and Misconduct Commission and a dedicated parliamentary committee charged with overseeing criminal justice matters (details of the fallout from the Fitzgerald Inquiry and their repercussions are discussed in Chapter 16).

Ultimately deposed: the burlesque finale to Joh's Premiership

The last year of Bjelke-Petersen's tenure as Premier was truly burlesque—grotesque to the point of parody and disbelief. The Premier's customary political astuteness seemed to have evaporated, yet he continued to act as though he was infallible. He had stopped listening to advice of which he did not wish to take heed or even receive. He had lost some of his key party supporters in cabinet and some ministers, such as Mike Ahern and Paul Clauson, were beginning to question his judgment and sanity. He had lost the support of his organisational champions in the party and had been publicly defeated in his moves to extend his own personal influence. He had publicly fallen out with former lieutenants such as Sir Robert Sparkes, who he said 'would have to go' as state president. Sparkes was now openly hostile and encouraging revolt against Bjelke-Petersen's leadership, even among ministers. The Premier had lost some key advisers such as Allen Callaghan or had come to disagree with others on political strategy, as with Ken Croke. He had fallen closer under the influence of other 'advisers' such as Ted Lyons, himself no man of the people, who simply urged the Premier to impose his authority, not to resign and to tough it out.

Bizarre announcements and even stranger events occurred seriatim during 1986–87. The Premier had given his personal backing to the sale and development of the Lindeman Island resort (involving Ted Lyons' East-West Airlines) but lost the political battle. He created a huge fight over whether condom vending machines could be installed in establishments as an anti-AIDS initiative. There

had been controversial incidents as police were ordered to remove condom vending machines from toilets at the University of Queensland campus. He had announced that the world's tallest skyscraper would be built in a car park in Brisbane's CBD—a proposal that was greeted with much scepticism.

He announced that he wanted to remain as Premier until after the opening of Expo 88 in April 1988 (until August, after which he would have served for 20 years as Premier and for more than 41 years and three months in the Parliament, making him the longest-serving member). This announcement worried his ministerial colleagues, who thought he was merely buying time and would not resign when the time came.

In late November 1987, Bjelke-Petersen refused to meet with his ministers and discuss his leadership. Instead he opted to sack those ministers he accused of going behind his back and being disloyal. He visited the Governor on 23 and 24 November to try to obtain the Governor's support for his sacking of five ministers, followed possibly by the calling of an early election to resolve the crisis. He also proposed to offer his own resignation and that of the entire ministry, with a new ministry to be sworn in immediately without any of the troublesome ministers. The Governor, Sir Walter Campbell, refused to act immediately on this advice, saying that he 'as Governor would need to be satisfied, before re-commissioning the Premier, that he could form a new administration and that he and his new Ministry had the confidence of Parliament' (Barlow and Corkery 2007:15). He recommended the Parliament be recalled to resolve the political crisis. It was constitutionally the correct and wisest course of action for the Governor to suggest, but it was also a courageous stance by the Governor to rebuff his Premier. At subsequent meetings, Campbell asked for a letter establishing the facts of the crisis and the proposed restructuring, including discussions with the full ministry. He subsequently received further advice from Deputy Premier Gunn and from Ahern and Austin that the Premier no longer had the support of his parliamentary party.

In retaliation, the Premier called in all five ministers he intended to dismiss individually, demanding their resignations, which they all steadfastly refused to give. The five named included even a loyal Bjelke-Petersen supporter, Peter McKechnie, who was told by the Premier that he was being sacked not because he was disloyal, 'just not loyal enough' (*Four Corners*, ABC TV, 2008). As Coaldrake commented, when asked to resign,

all five refused. Mr McKenzie was reportedly told he was being sacked for showing insufficient loyalty, Mr Muntz was apparently given no reason, Mr Austin because he had been seen speaking with Sir Robert Sparkes at the party's state conference, Mr Ahern for allegedly leaking and

moral irresponsibility, and Mr Gunn (Sir Joh's deputy) for nominating Sir Robert Sparkes for another term as party president. (*AJPH* 1988:vol. 34, no. 2, p. 240)

In the end, Bjelke-Petersen sacked three senior ministers: Ahern, Austin and McKechnie. Gunn and Muntz were given a reprieve. To replace these outgoing ministers, he effected a minor reshuffle and appointed two new 'loyalist' ministers—Gordon Simpson (Mines and Energy and the Arts) and Kev Lingard (Health and Environment)—both of whom would occupy the posts for just seven days, equalling the shortest term as a minister. When Allen Callaghan said to the Premier 'the National Party won't be happy with this process', Bjelke-Petersen said back to his former adviser, 'I am the National Party' (*Four Corners*, ABC TV, 2008). Shades of '*L'État, c'est Moi*'.

A stand-off now ensued, with Bjelke-Petersen locking himself in his executive suite in the Executive Building on George Street, not wanting to come out and not wanting to allow his former colleagues in. He remained bunkered in his office for days.¹ Take-away food was delivered and lamb chops were served for lunch. Only a few selected supporters were allowed access to him.

The tempestuous events surrounding the removal of Bjelke-Petersen did not greatly involve the Parliament itself. The Parliament was told one day (10 November 1987) that the government members had full confidence in Bjelke-Petersen's leadership (with all 48 on the floor of the Assembly voting in support), then eight sitting days later (on 2 December 1987), the Parliament was informed of the new leadership. The party-room meeting of the Nationals (held without Bjelke-Petersen, who remained in the Executive Building) occurred on 26 November in Parliament House, at which Bjelke-Petersen was deposed and Ahern was elected leader with 30 votes from the 48 available. So unsure were the Nationals that the Governor would accept their advice that they made all members sign a letter agreeing unanimously to the leadership change; it was signed by all 48 members, with Mick Veivers and Don Lane playing enforcers (for an account of the event, see Lane 1993:221). Gunn was elected deputy and Lin Powell nominated as the next Speaker. The Nationals still did not trust Bjelke-Petersen, who some felt might attempt a vote of confidence in his government on the floor of the Parliament (hoping to secure cross-party support). So, as of 26 November, Ahern was new leader of the Nationals—but not yet the Premier as he was entitled to be. Bjelke-Petersen refused to resign his commissions as Premier and member of the Executive Council.

¹ But not six, as Reynolds (2003:344) claims—presumably 26 November to 1 December—as he visited his farm at Kingaroy on a secret mission on 29 November, met with the Governor many times, visited the airport to meet an overseas delegation and visited a goat farm at Toogoolawah (see *Sun Herald*, 15 November 1992, pp. 21–30).

According to Russell Grenning (Russ Hinze's press secretary), on the evening of 27 November:

The omnipresent, all-powerful Premier of Queensland had barricaded himself in his office. It was bizarre and Russ [Hinze] went to the door and banged on the door. Joh wouldn't open the door and Russ was bending down, talking to him through the keyhole with tears running down his face, saying 'Joh, come out mate, it's all over'. (*Four Corners*, ABC TV, 2008)

His wife, Flo, visited him, to plead with him to come out, as did other former colleagues. And, eventually, he did go home at the weekend, but for an entirely different matter.

Even more bizarrely, Bjelke-Petersen had been conducting a secret 'dialogue with the enemy', contacting the Labor Party through Ted Lyons to seek its support in voting to defeat an Ahern-led attempt to form a Nationals' government with the support of the Liberals and some dissident Nationals. These negotiations led to a meeting with the ALP secretary, Peter Beattie, at the Premier's farm at Kingaroy on Sunday 29 November (see Wear 2002:124; Lane 1993:222–3; Beattie 2005; Bjelke-Petersen 1990). Bjelke-Petersen also entertained the view that he might be able to remain in power by sharing power with his opponents at the head of a loose coalition of dissident Nationals, Liberals and Labor members. His plan was almost beyond belief! The so-called 'deal with the devil' fell flat when the Premier refused to entertain electoral reform and Beattie (and his closest colleagues) refused to facilitate the ploy (there were echoes of the same sort of conspiratorial plotting that had occurred in reverse at the demise of the Gair government with Nicklin).

Nevertheless, with Bjelke-Petersen still hanging onto the Premiership, he called a final cabinet meeting for Monday 30 November, which he chaired and at which his legal fees for defamation cases were discussed (but it was not agreed at this stage that the Crown would pay). Two rival dates to recall the Parliament were also proposed, with cabinet deciding on the earlier date of 2 December—moved by Gunn against the Premier's wishes. Ahern, Austin and McKechnie, no longer ministers, were not invited to the meeting but waited downstairs to hear the outcome. When the other ministers appeared from the cabinet meeting, it was agreed that two of Bjelke-Petersen's 'most unabashed supporters', Gibbs and Gunn, would make one last attempt to convince the Premier to surrender (Lane 1993:224). As agreed, these two were to inform the Premier that unless he resigned, the cabinet would not agree to pay his legal bills of about \$200 000 (but possibly up to \$300 000). That same afternoon, Bjelke-Petersen signed his letter of resignation from all his official duties and posts dated from 1 December 1987.

Bjelke-Petersen, then seventy-six years of age, did not reappear in the Parliament after he was deposed. Speaking later of the events, Bjelke-Petersen said: 'Parliament was not sitting, so for the time being there was not a power on earth which could have forced me out of office if I did not want to go' (Wear 2002:124). At the time, he memorably told reporters that

the policies of the National Party are no longer those in which I went to the people. Therefore I do not wish to lead this government any longer. It was my intention to take this matter to the floor of state Parliament, however I now have no interest in leading the National Party any further. I have decided to resign as premier and retire from parliament effective immediately. (*ABC News Online*, 23 April 2005)

To his mind, it was not he who had been spurned by his own party; *he* had turned his back on the party he had formerly led.

The measure of a politician is sometimes not how they attain office, but how they leave it. With Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, there is no single, definitive assessment of him as a political leader as he departed public office. Five quotes provide some insights from people who were contemporary witnesses at close hand. They include friends and foes, rivals and commentators.

John Howard, federal Opposition Leader in 1987, said:

He will go down in history as the great wrecker of the conservative side of politics; not a man of vision and achievement but a man who for his own selfish power desires, with no basis of any policy or principle, is prepared to embark upon a wrecking course...[but he added in 2005 when the former Premier died] He made an enormous contribution during his premiership. (*ABC News Online*)

Bjelke-Petersen's former media and political adviser, Allen Callaghan, reflected: 'He was starting not to listen. Hubris seizes all politicians and we know the old Chinese maxim: absolute power lasts 10 years...I think at the end he had stopped listening to contrary advice' (*ABC News Online*).

His political opponent at the time, Nev Warburton, said when the Parliament resumed:

[This] is the first sitting in 40 years without the previous Premier and National Party member for Barambah, who, as everyone knows, was politically decapitated yesterday evening. It is the first sitting day in 40 years without this old conservative hero whom the National Party wanted only months ago to make its Prime Minister of Australia but whom it has now dumped and savaged like a pack of hungry dogs...Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen was a leader who wrecked without sympathy, the

lives of too many decent Queenslanders for short-term political ends, and he relied for this power on a rigged electoral system that is grossly offensive to fundamental democratic rights...Few tears will be shed for the end of a career that strayed on far too long; but it must be said in fairness that Sir Joh alone is not to blame for all of those sins over the past 19 years that the National Party embraced but now pretends to disown and forget. (*QPD* 1987:vol. 307, pp. 4737–8)

In the same debate, Bjelke-Petersen's former ministerial colleague and now the Minister for Mines and Energy, Martin Tenni, said:

I believe in my heart that history will judge Sir Joh very generously indeed. His record of achievements for Queensland will never be erased. The people of the far north join with me in placing on record sincere appreciation for the contribution that Sir Joh has made to the development of the far north and the State as a whole. (*QPD* 1987:vol. 307, p. 4754)

Finally, the *Sydney Morning Herald* (25 April 2005) depicted the 'life and times of Joh Bjelke-Petersen' in the following terms:

The English historian Lord Acton noted the corruptive tendencies of power and the truism that 'absolute power corrupts absolutely'...By the late 1980s, however, when Sir Joh was trying to stave off predators within his National Party government, the events in Queensland were giving the clearest illustration in modern Australian history of the essential truth of Lord Acton's observation. Sir Joh, who ruled as premier of Queensland for 19 years with almost total disregard of Parliament, the bureaucracy and convention, had succumbed to pressure and allowed the Fitzgerald royal commission into police corruption, convinced that no probe could dent him. After all, in the run-up to his disastrous 1987 Joh-for-PM bid, he had declared, without hint of jest: 'I'm a bushfire raging out of control'. That campaign—backed by spivs and the disaffected—ruined John Howard's first shot at the prime ministership and ripped apart the National Party. The dissent evident then in conservative politics, with Sir Joh wearing the badge of chief wrecker, would re-emerge a decade later with Pauline Hanson's One Nation.