

## 16. The end of an era, 1987–1989

For God's sake let us sit on the ground  
And tell sad stories of the death of kings:  
How some have been depos'd, some slain in war,  
Some haunted by the ghosts they have depos'd,  
Some poison'd by their wives, some sleeping kill'd  
All murder'd—for within the hollow crown  
That rounds the moral temples of a king  
Keeps Death his court; and there the antics sits,  
Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp.

— William Shakespeare, *King Richard II* (Act 3[2]:155)

The revelations of the Fitzgerald Inquiry hung over the 'besieged' Ahern government from its initial day in office: 1 December 1987 (Reynolds 2003:348). The revelations and fallout from the inquiry would plague Ahern's Premiership until he was replaced by Russell Cooper at the demise of the Nationals' government in December 1989. These two years were some of the most dramatic in the state's history. Day by day, sensational allegations and admissions were exposed as senior police and informers turned state's evidence and, for full confessions and cooperation, received immunity from subsequent prosecution. Whistleblowers emerged from the woodwork; once one informant talked others followed. The networks of corruption and misconduct were quickly unravelling only to be pursued to the next level by eager and diligent investigators. There were mounting suggestions that the connections stretched to the very top of government. There was a surreal quality to Queensland politics.

Mike Ahern inherited a poisoned chalice. Senior National ministers had long been anxious to displace Bjelke-Petersen from the premiership—by urging him either to retire or move over to the federal level. Once they had seized the prized trophy, however, they found they were holding a 'hollow crown'—assuming the mantle of office that seemed to be nothing more than a facade. Ahern and his ministers would preside over the gradual disintegration of the regime, beset by scandals, revelations of corruption, resignations and retirements. As months went by, the government was wracked by internecine political divisions and there was a good deal of internal dysfunctionality at the centre of government (Reynolds 2002:Chs 5, 8). Despite that, the Ahern government began the long and arduous process of reform, which would run for more than a decade (see Reynolds 2002; Prasser et al. 1992; Stevens and Wanna 1993; Lewis et al. 2010). Ahern's announced intention was to embrace a 'vision of excellence', which variously meant everything and nothing.

Amid the hurly-burly, Premier Ahern recalled the Parliament for a special sitting on 2 December 1987, lasting for just one full day. The Parliament had been adjourned on 20 November at which point the usual valedictory speeches were made, thanks was given to colleagues, family, staff and the media, and everyone was wished a 'very happy and very blessed Christmas'. Sounding a little weary, the former Premier had stated that the 'House rises for the Christmas recess' in moving that the House be adjourned until 10 am on a date to be fixed by the Speaker. The other party leaders offered their felicitations and the Speaker, Kev Lingard, said that the end-of-session drinks were on him in the Function Room of the Parliament.

At the special resumption, there was much evidence of confusion and apprehension behind the scenes. The Clerk read out Lingard's resignation as Speaker dated from midnight 24 November—owing to the fact he had accepted a ministry (Health and Environment) for seven days in the last attempt by Bjelke-Petersen to shore up his leadership. Ahern had originally intended to call the Parliament back at 2.30 pm on 2 December but had to be informed by the Acting Speaker, Ted Row, that the House had to meet at 10 am as required by the final adjournment vote on 20 November. Ahern had not had time to finalise a new ministry, so had himself and his deputy, Bill Gunn, sworn in as Premier and Deputy Premier, respectively, on 1 December. These two ministers were commissioned as a two-man interim ministry, dividing the entire 18 portfolios between themselves for a period of nine days. This was the only time in Queensland's political history that the resort to such an interim two-person ministry was necessitated. Lane (1993:223) recalled in his memoirs:

A discussion took place regarding the makeup of a future Ahern Ministry and it was agreed by all of us that rather than risk losing the votes in Parliament of any dumped Ministers, Ahern and Gunn should make up a two-man Cabinet until a full Cabinet could be chosen in a less volatile environment. This latter proved to be a major tactical error on my part in agreeing so readily.

When the Parliament resumed on Tuesday 2 December, its first task was to elect a new Speaker. Lin Powell had been nominated by the Nationals' party-room meeting held on 26 November. Ahern had been considering appointing Des Booth (NP, Warwick), a loyal supporter of his, but accepted the nomination of Powell—a known ardent supporter of Bjelke-Petersen—perhaps in an endeavour to hold the fractious party together. Powell had been publicly critical of Ahern and the new Premier might have preferred not to have him in cabinet. So, through tactical necessity, Ahern nominated Powell for the Speakership and Gunn seconded the move. Ahern said that Powell had been an MP for 13 years,

a minister for five years, Leader of the House for a year, but most importantly ‘as a former schoolteacher, he will bring the necessary discipline to this place’ (*QPD* 1987:vol. 307, p. 4736).

Opposition Leader Warburton’s response to the nomination of Powell for Speaker was most peculiar. His phraseology gave the impression he had not been expecting the leadership change or the sudden resumption of the Parliament, and was caught out in his response. Suddenly, the arch opponent of the former Premier appeared to be his concerned advocate. The Labor leader claimed that the Nationals had behaved duplicitously, had sabotaged the former Premier, were now denigrating Bjelke-Petersen and had ‘dumped and savaged [Joh] like a pack of hungry dogs’ (see full quote at the end of Chapter 15). Warburton claimed Ahern ‘and his crew were prepared to stoop to the lowest possible depths in order to buy Sir Joh out’, presumably referring to the promise the Ahern group had made to the Premier about covering his legal costs.<sup>1</sup> From Labor’s perspective, Warburton was more prescient when he stated that ‘a long, often unhappy chapter closes in Queensland and a new uncertain one begins’ (*QPD* 1987:vol. 307, p. 4740). Labor proposed Clem Campbell as its nominee, while Bill Knox nominated Bill Lickiss. The wily old Russ Hinze told the opposition they could expect better government, that some reforms to the Parliament would be introduced now that Bjelke-Petersen was gone and promised ‘we are in for better days’. He concluded his short speech, alluding to a project recently embraced by his former leader, by saying ‘I have grave doubts that the Opposition will see in Brisbane the tallest building in Queensland’ (*QPD* 1987:vol. 307, p. 4765)—something one wit referred to as ‘Joh’s last failed erection’. After various speeches from both sides of the Chamber, speculating how far the new administration would in fact reform government and parliamentary practice, and attempting somewhat to reconstruct the historical record, the ‘historic’ debate descended into name-calling, finger-pointing over who was the biggest drunk in the House, reading out spoof telegrams, speculating on who would become a minister and rehashing the shenanigans of the ‘Joh for PM campaign’. Len Ardill asserted with some degree of passion that he would prefer Powell in any position other than as Education Minister (because of his ideological and religious views), a comment that received an interjection of ‘you will regret those words’ from a government member. Beryce Nelson was so appalled by the debate she stated, ‘I am saddened to have to comment on the shabby and

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne Goss claimed in April 1988 that the former Premier had to be prised from office by ‘showing him the accounts for legal fees associated with publicly funded defamation actions against members of this Parliament’. He cited a current affairs program that had suggested that the bill for the legal fees was more than \$300 000. He asked Premier Ahern whether these bills had been ‘used as a political bargaining chip’ in telling the Premier ‘he would have to pay them himself if he did not leave office’. Ahern replied that he had ‘no knowledge’ of the matter of the legal fees, that it was a ‘complete fairy story’ and claimed he was ‘completely unaware of any threats made against the former Premier in respect of the payment of legal fees’ (*QPD* 1988:vol. 308, p. 5778).

pitiful performances today of the members of the two opposition parties' (*QPD* 1987:vol. 307, p. 4791). After a six-hour debate that rapidly lost all semblance of purpose, Powell received 48 votes to Campbell's 30 and 10 for Lickiss. The vote was decided entirely on party lines. Becoming Speaker did not inhibit Powell from vehemently criticising the Ahern ministry from the sanctity of the Speaker's position.

After the election of the Speaker, the House took a short break to enable the new Speaker to be presented to the Governor, but resumed almost immediately at 5.06 pm to debate a vote of confidence in the new Ahern government moved by the new Premier himself. After announcing the interim duumvirate ministry, Ahern moved 'that this House expresses its confidence in the Government' (*QPD* 1987:vol. 307, p. 4804). He then spoke to his own motion promising 'stable progressive government', promoting a 'vision of excellence' and predicting 'it is the beginning of a renaissance...the best is yet to come' (*QPD* 1987:vol. 307, p. 4804). To him, 'what this Parliament is witnessing today—and what the people of Queensland will be relieved to know—is that there is a change of Government without this Government changing' (*QPD* 1987:vol. 307, p. 4804). Gunn spoke of 'Bjelke-Petersen's great achievements during the prime of his Premiership'. He said the Ahern/Gunn government would build on the 'best of those foundations' and that 'the dawning of a new age in Queensland politics' would be 'like a breath of fresh air through the corridors that has already sent a chill into those on the Opposition benches' (*QPD* 1987:vol. 307, p. 4807). Ahern tried to contrast his style of 'placing principle before personality' with what he regarded as Labor's unprincipled opportunism. On two occasions, Ahern interjected to ask whether the Opposition Leader, Nev Warburton, had sent the outgoing State secretary, Peter Beattie, to Bethany to meet secretly with Bjelke-Petersen. Other government members also attempted to paint the Labor and Liberal Parties as 'a coalition in opposition', because they had spent considerable time in the media agreeing with each other on criticisms of the Nationals.

Reynolds (2002:101) has claimed the opposition 'did not seriously contest the debate', yet the two speakers nominated to reply to the motion made no worse a fist of it than Labor usually did when addressing such motions. The opposition complained it was premature to bring on a vote-of-confidence motion before a full ministry was announced. Labor was less impressed with the new language of government, describing the Premier as 'Marshmallow Mike' who hid behind Bjelke-Petersen's skirts. Warburton, in his last day in Parliament as parliamentary Labor leader, moved an amendment asking for the abolition of the gerrymander, a public accounts committee, a review of education, plans to reduce unemployment and a pecuniary interests register for all parliamentarians! He said, 'how can anyone here honestly give support now for a "vision of excellence" which the Fitzgerald inquiry shows day after day has allowed the

growth of uncontrolled police corruption and organised crime?’ (*QPD* 1987:vol. 307, p. 4811). In seconding Warburton’s motion, Tom Burns made a wide-ranging, damning speech describing Ahern as ‘a new Venus rising cleansed from the foam—beautiful, pristine and pure, untainted by the entrenched corruption and cronyism the Fitzgerald commission is now laying bare’. He called for the former Premier to appear before the Fitzgerald Inquiry, while accusing Ahern of making hollow promises about delivering open and honest government. Burns then went through Ahern’s record in various ministries, listing what he considered his shortcomings and embarrassments. He also, however, became easily sidetracked, raising issues such as the superannuation payout to the former Premier’s pilot, Beryl Young (who had resigned without giving the required notice). Burns finished up by saying that in all his years in state politics, Ahern ‘has played the role of the three wise monkeys—hear no evil, see no evil and speak no evil’ (*QPD* 1987:vol. 307, p. 4819). This was a theme against Ahern that Labor would adopt through to the election.

The Liberals, in contrast, had resolved to support the confidence motion, welcoming the new change of government. Bill Knox, in his last day as parliamentary leader, moved his own set of amendments covering police manpower, the need for legislation to prevent the exploitation of young people through prostitution and pornography, public sector reform, a foreign ownership register, the repeal of the *Education Act* amendments and an end to ministerial land rezoning! No small wish list, but erring perhaps on the side of eclecticism.

Other contributions to the confidence debate were less than laudable, bordered on the ridiculous or were outright inane. Ian Henderson spoke of AIDS and leprosy epidemics, of impending moral collapse, of Caligula and his horse and of Warburton being displaced not by the Member for Logan, Wayne Goss, but by the Liberals’ leader, Bill Knox. To interjections that he was ‘sick’, he compared the Liberal Party with brands of ladies’ pantihose and men’s underwear, claiming he knew nothing about types of pantihose but citing as his source of information the new Member for Toowong, Denver Beanland. Angus Innes replied to Henderson’s rave. He said that it came as something of a surprise to hear Henderson ‘did not know anything about pantihose. We thought he wore pantihose; but of course he is a bachelor’ and then added he should ‘not get quite as excited about the topic’ (*QPD* 1987:vol. 307, p. 4828). Reynolds (2002:100) suggests that Henderson made his ‘usual spiteful diatribe’ against the Liberals, while Lane (1993:144) remembered that Henderson ‘was not on the same wavelength as his country colleagues’. Tony FitzGerald first accused the Liberals of hypocrisy for criticising National ministers of the last government for clinging on to the trappings of office when they themselves had done so in 1983. Then, giving the impression he had brought along the wrong speech, he went into a long detailed argument about electoral representation. He defended

the proportion of seats the Nationals occupied and quoted from a National Party submission that argued Labor would 'need to win only 51.4 percent of the two-party preferred vote to become the Government', which evoked a predictable interjection from David Hamill, who said, 'Only 51.4!' (*QPD* 1987:vol. 307, p. 4837). Sometimes it was as if the Mad Hatter's Tea Party had descended on Queensland from on high. Accompanying this debate were at least three protests or disturbances from people in the public gallery and police and attendants were eventually instructed to empty the entire gallery.

After eight speakers had conducted a pro-forma debate lasting four and one-quarter hours, Brian Austin applied the gag and moved that the motion be put. Wayne Goss was particularly incensed that the new government had gagged its first debate. As the final divisions were being called, Goss said: 'You gagged your first debate. What a Record! You gagged your first debate. What a fraud!' (*QPD* 1987:vol. 307, p. 4840) (the resort to the 'gag' was something the Ahern–Austin team used frequently to expedite parliamentary business). The confidence motion was won by 57 votes to 27, with the Liberals voting with the Nationals. When Austin rose to move the adjournment for the Christmas recess, Knox moved that the Parliament return the next week because there was much business to be attended to, but his motion failed and the Parliament adjourned. Again the Speaker provided Christmas drinks and savouries in the members' dining room.

## The first Ahern ministry

The main interest in the new-18 member Ahern ministry was who was to be included and who would miss out. Ahern was apparently in a quandary over whether to make wholesale changes and 'have a clean sweep' or merely settle for a few minor changes. In the end, he chose to compromise. He already had two vacancies (Bjelke-Petersen and Powell), but in a show of resolution he decided to jettison another three former ministers. Paradoxically two of these dropped ministers were key Ahern supporters who had helped engineer his bid to become Premier. In framing his frontbench, the new Premier considered it inadvisable to reappoint two former stalwarts of the government, Don Lane and Russ Hinze, both of whom had come under intense scrutiny by the investigators attached to the Fitzgerald Inquiry. Lane (1993), who had become close friends with Ahern, provided a personal account of his (and Hinze's) sacking (or effectively non-reappointment on 7 December). The Premier had met with Tony Fitzgerald and his senior counsel, Ian Callinan QC, over the weekend and they informed him that some damaging evidence about Lane and Hinze was likely to emerge as they pursued their investigations (initially regarding Lane's involvement in a judicial appointment but later other improprieties and allegations Hinze was

engaged ‘in SP betting’). The diaries of the Police Commissioner, Terry Lewis, were to be produced and admitted as evidence before the commission and there was mention in them of some interference over the appointment of a judge (Eric Pratt to the Police Complaints Tribunal). Ahern suggested to Lane that two junior ministers (perhaps Harvey and Littleproud) would occupy their posts, but would stand down if Lane and Hinze were cleared (requiring undated resignation letters from the new appointees).<sup>2</sup> Ahern had far less qualms about dropping Yvonne Chapman—a vocal Bjelke-Petersen supporter—from the frontbench. Ahern also chose not to reinstate two former ministers: Tony Elliott, who was Tourism Minister for one term in 1980–83; and Kev Lingard, who had been a minister for a week during the leadership transition.

With a total of five vacancies to fill, Ahern appointed a number of new, younger ministers to his first ministry, including: Rob Borbidge, Jim Randell, Russell Cooper, Leisha Harvey and Brian Littleproud; it was a cautious mix of experience with a balance of country and urban candidates. The relatively new ministers Paul Clauson and Don Neal were retained but Neal was moved from Corrective Services to the portfolio of Water Resources and Maritime Services. The newly elected Denver Beanland (Lib., Toowong) made a telling point later in the Parliament when he said that the Nationals ‘have gone to exceptional lengths to try to create the perception that it is a new so-called conservative Government and that it is setting a new trend’, when in fact 13 of the ministry were former members of Bjelke-Petersen’s cabinets (*QPD* 1988:vol. 309, p. 850).

The final line up of the first Ahern ministry was

- Premier, Treasurer and Minister for the Arts: Mike Ahern
- Deputy Premier and Minister for Public Works, Main Roads and Expo and Minister for Police: Bill Gunn
- Minister for Transport: Ivan Gibbs
- Minister for Land Management: Bill Glasson
- Minister for Finance and Minister Assisting the Premier and Treasurer (and Leader of the House): Brian Austin
- Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Affairs: Vince Lester
- Minister for Mines and Energy: Martin Tenni
- Minister for Primary Industries: Nev Harper
- Minister for Environment, Conservation and Tourism: Geoff Muntz
- Minister for Family Services and Welfare Housing: Peter McKechnie

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<sup>2</sup> Goss accused Ahern in November 1988 of dropping these two ministers—Lane and Hinze—from the frontbench for cosmetic reasons, saying to him ‘you knocked off Lane and Hinze to suit your PR advice’ (*QPD* 1988:vol. 310, p. 2685).

- Minister for Northern Development, Community Services and Ethnic Affairs: Bob Katter
- Minister for Water Resources and Maritime Services: Don Neal
- Minister for Justice and Attorney-General: Paul Clauson
- Minister for Industry, Small Business, Communications and Technology: Rob Borbidge
- Minister for Local Government and Racing: Jim Randell
- Minister for Corrective Services and Administrative Services: Russell Cooper
- Minister for Health: Leisha Harvey
- Minister for Education, Youth and Sport: Brian Littleproud

The ministry was sworn in on 9 December 1987 and reported to the Parliament when it next met, in March 1988. Interestingly, one of the immediate policy changes Ahern considered introducing was a 'Code of Conduct for Ministers' (based on one drawn up by Dr Llew Edwards years before for Liberal ministers), but the Premier refused to issue the code when he realised that it contained a provision for the registering of the pecuniary interests of MPs' spouses and immediate family (Lane 1993:223). He thought that a step too far, but in 1989 would introduce such a code to provide guidance to his ministers and help protect his government (Accountability of Cabinet Ministers, Register of Interests).

When the Parliament resumed in March 1988, for the first time each of the three main parties had appointed a new leader. After the Premier had formally confirmed his new ministry, Labor announced that it had replaced the old warhorse Nev Warburton with Wayne Goss as Opposition Leader, with Tom Burns remaining his deputy. Labor was also allowed to table a full listing of its 'Shadow Ministry' of 18, which included some of their newer and tertiary-trained members such as Paul Braddy, Pat Comben, Keith De Lacy and David Hamill, as well as those with a background in trade union matters, such as Burns, Terry Mackenroth, Bob Gibbs, Ron McLean, Glen Milliner and Ken Vaughan (see Chapter 13 for the full list). Warburton was not included in Goss's initial frontbench and two others (Anne Warner and Dean Wells) who would also make it into Goss's first ministry were not then included. As Opposition Leader, Goss would take the fight up to the government doing about as much as he possibly could do in very constrained circumstances. The Liberals also informed the House that Bill Knox was no longer the Liberal leader and that Angus Innes would now lead the party with Peter Beard (Lib., Mount Isa) as his deputy. The race was on to 'cut through' to the electorate with a new generation of political leaders, all of whom were inexperienced in leadership.

Labor's parliamentary tactics consisted of constantly presenting Ahern as weak, indecisive and vacillating, in contrast with the strong image of the former Premier. Labor kept reminding the Parliament that Ahern had been present through the whole of Bjelke-Petersen's Premiership and had seen what had gone on. He was accused of supporting the Springboks emergency, the ban on street marches, the politicisation of the police, the sacking of SEQEB workers and of turning a blind eye to the corruption and conflicts of interest. He had not raised a voice publicly about dodgy contracts going to National Party knights and others close to the government. The three ministers who had served as Police Minister (the current incumbent, Bill Gunn, as well as former ministers Russ Hinze and Bill Glasson), were also accused of covering up the illegal brothel industry and the prostitution rackets, drug running and illegal gambling. Goss marked the first 100 days of the Ahern administration claiming the government had nothing to show for all the changes and was a 'wavering and limp government'. He quoted the former Premier, by now deeply embittered, as saying '[n]either Flo nor I am prepared to prop up a tired old party that does not know where it's going. It's so tragic it would be laughable if it wasn't so sad. The poor chaps are hopeless' (*QPD* 1988:vol. 307, p. 4859). Dean Wells accused Ahern's ministers of sitting by in cabinet knowing corruption was flourishing, initially calling them a 'gaggle of fawning Tories' but, after Minister Brian Littleproud complained the words were offensive, he swapped them for a 'group of sycophantic crawlers' (*QPD* 1988:vol. 310, p. 2154).

Ahern's counter-tactic was to try to appear as if he was offering an entirely new agenda, while allowing the Fitzgerald Inquiry to run its full course. He continually stressed the need for greater economic coordination, for public sector reform and some reform to parliamentary procedures (such as the establishment of parliamentary committees scrutinising public accounts and public works). After the October 1987 stock market crash, a new economic agenda was urgent, especially as some 130 000 people across Queensland were now unemployed. Ahern accused Goss of trying to 'talk down' the state's economy (a tactic commonly used by governments against their opponents) and would continually allude to Labor's inability to manage the economy of the state, pointing to the disastrous record of other state Labor governments as evidence of chronic mismanagement (Brian Burke and WA Inc., the Cain government in Victoria and the Bannon government in South Australia). A number of senior ministers began to refer to Goss as 'whinging Wayne', who knocked everything. Ahern became increasingly testy with Goss, accusing him of spinning yarns about the government, saying to repeated criticisms that 'I have heard it all before. I have heard it every day...Every day you're at it. It's the same old gramophone record' (*QPD* 1988:vol. 310, p. 2309).

Various ministers in the Ahern government also took to presenting numerous and sometimes lengthy ministerial statements at the beginning of a parliamentary sitting day, partly in order to absorb the time allotted to question time so that tough questions could not be asked by the opposition. The Health Minister, Leisha Harvey, was a particularly regular offender. For instance, in 1988, it was not unusual to have up to six separate ministerial statements each read out by the relevant minister (including routine announcements of the pending retirement of senior public servants—such as Sir Leo Hielscher—or detailed financial statements on the federal Medicare agreements; even one ministerial statement on the supposed evil effects of socialist policies on family life!). This tactic, which infuriated the opposition, often reduced question time to a few questions (as on 15 March 1988 when only two questions were permitted before the Speaker called an end to time). It was a strange way to show commitment to parliamentary reform.

## Ahern's initial priorities

The initial bills introduced and passed by the Ahern government were evidence largely of tidying up in the aftermath of the Bjelke-Petersen era. The government pushed through a backlog of legislation including: the *Marine Parks Act* amendments, an Industry and Commerce Training Bill, a bill to restrict the Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road, the *Auctioneers and Agents Act* amendments, a film censorship amendment bill, amendments to the *Meat Industry Act*, a Libraries and Archives Bill, changes to the *Jury Act*, amendments to the *Performing Arts Trust Act* and the *Poultry Act*, amendments to the *Land Act* and *Gas Act*, to industrial relations in the electricity sector and legislation to prevent unconscionable land dealings. It was a most prosaic beginning and early on it was difficult to detect anything that distinguished the new government from its predecessor.

On coming to office, the Ahern government was blitzed with problems and distractions from many quarters: World Heritage listings of rainforests, proposals to list Fraser Island as a World Heritage site, Medicare agreements with the Commonwealth, the escalation in unemployment numbers, ministerial expenses, payouts and entitlements to Bjelke-Petersen, the mooted visit of the Italian porn star Cicciolina (Ilona Staller), allegations of cronyism on government boards, the infamous 'Route 20' road upgrade and flyover in Brisbane's western suburbs, Ariadne's canal estates, foreign takeovers, prison break-outs and other disturbances in detention centres, prison inmate security, Power beer and the brewing company's use of voluntary employment contracts, whether to introduce random breath testing for motorists, the integrity of the tertiary entrance scheme, daylight saving, in-vitro fertilisation and surrogate

parenthood, and the redevelopment of the Expo site after the exposition. Some of the material tabled supposedly over the Cicciolina tour was so explicit it had to be expunged from *Hansard*, but the record of the rest remains.

Interestingly, one of the initial pieces of legislation introduced by the Ahern government (on only its tenth day back in 1988) was the Parliamentary Members' Salaries Bill, which was designed to provide politicians with increased salaries (pegged to the Commonwealth Remuneration Tribunal rather than the Queensland Public Service) and increased superannuation benefits—to both them and their families. Brian Austin, for the government, argued that setting salaries close to the Commonwealth recommendations for remuneration (at \$500 less) was more 'cost-effective' and independent. It also made parliamentary salaries in Queensland the second-highest in Australia. Notably, the opposition did not oppose the bill when it came back for debate on 19 April. Keith De Lacy said he had 'drawn the short straw, as it were, to put the Opposition's point of view' to the salary increases. He did comment on the irony of politicians voting themselves substantial pay increases outside the general wage-fixing system, when the rest of Australia (under the Accord arrangements) was being asked to exercise wage restraint (*QPD* 1988:vol. 308, pp. 6012–13).

Brian Austin introduced the Public Service Management and Employment Bill, claiming it provided the most significant reforms to the public service in the past century. The legislation enabled senior staff to be employed on fixed-term contracts, which the government considered flexible but Labor said left the door open to appointments of staff who had the 'right political affiliation' or had personal connections.<sup>3</sup> This was evidence in Austin's words of 'a new and enlightened government' (*QPD* 1988:vol. 310, p. 2802).

Russell Cooper had a particularly torrid baptism as the Corrective Services Minister, with prison riots prevalent and escapes by inmates increasing. To provide him with advice on how to proceed, Cooper invited businessman Jim Kennedy to undertake an investigation of the management of the troubled prison system. Kennedy completed a thorough review and presented his interim report in May 1988, with a final report delivered in September 1988 (Commission of Review into Corrective Services in Queensland). The report advocated that a dedicated statutory authority be established to monitor corrective services. The government introduced three integrated pieces of legislation (the Corrective Services [Administration] Bill, a consolidation bill to bring together the *Prisons*

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<sup>3</sup> During these debates, the Employment Minister, Vince Lester, was accused of employing 'hopeless people who have connections to him'. Citing a whole list of nepotistic appointments, De Lacy alleged that Lester had employed his shire clerk's daughter as a departmental liaison officer, a pretty model as another, his Capella teacher became a departmental research officer, while 'his girlfriend' became another liaison officer and received an 'unmarked government car'. At this point, Lester raised a point of order claiming he had no girlfriend and asked that that mention be withdrawn (*QPD* 1988:vol. 308, p. 6240). He did not ask for other claims to be withdrawn but said they were not all accurate.

*Act* and the *Offenders Probation and Parole Act*, and another to deal with other consequential matters) to establish such an authority—the Queensland Corrective Services Commission—a body at arm's length from the government and with its own board and chief executive officer. While initially sceptical of the efficacy of privately operated prisons (in his interim report), by the time he produced the final report, Kennedy was convinced that there should be greater involvement of specialist private sector operators in prison services. Cooper predicted that the Corrective Services Bill would 'allow much-needed reform to Queensland's corrective services system' (QPD 1989:vol. 310, p. 2096). One consequence of these important reforms was the contract to establish Australia's first privately managed prison, which was signed in September 1989 before the change of government. The Borallon Corrective Centre then came into operation in January 1990.

## The 'Expo 88' interlude and the transformation of Brisbane

Despite some initial protests over dislocation, Expo 88 provided the one welcomed interlude of relief for the Ahern government. Staged on Southbank with fully demountable facilities, Expo 88 was opened by the Queen in April 1988. It was a huge celebration of leisure, technology, history, cuisine and different cultures. In a short time, Expo 88 transformed Brisbane from a sleepy country town that almost closed down at weekends to a vibrant metropolis with entirely new social attitudes to leisure and lifestyles, outdoor eating, restaurants and cafes and shopping. Expo changed the ways that Brisbane people thought of and used the city. It transformed the Southbank area, turning the site from a rundown dump of old wharves and rough pubs into an open parkland, with amphitheatres, restaurants, outdoor barbecues, cafes, modern hotels, cultural venues, fairs, water features, a sandy beach and decorative canals. Southbank was redefined as a place dedicated to eating and drinking and hedonistic pursuits. Brisbanites and out-of-town visitors shared an obvious enjoyment of the cultural event, which ran for six months. And for the first time in living memory, the queues of patients presenting to casualty wards in public hospitals evaporated overnight.

Behind the scenes, however, the enthusiasm for Expo did not prevent the Ahern government from offering a series of contracts to construction firms, suppliers and caterers without going to tender. The former Premier's friend Sir Leslie Thiess won a construction contract despite being ranked seventeenth on merit by the Expo authority—a perplexing decision that was 'leaked' by a cabinet minister. Contracts to provide catering were also offered to local business

identities with close associations to the National Party, such as Ann Garms, who came in for some criticism in the Parliament for alleged ‘cronyism’. Opposition members kept claiming that old habits die hard.

The fate of the Southbank site after Expo 88 was not, however, determined and aroused much politicking. The resulting parklands, public infrastructure and community-based land use came about more by accident than design. Continued public access to Southbank as a leisure precinct was mostly a product of popular pressure and outrage at mega-scale commercial proposals from private interests, with pressure also being applied through the Parliament. Business associates close to the government (such as River City 2000) talked about claiming the site for private development, locating canal estates for executives and building rows of high-rise apartments overlooking the river and CBD. They wanted to clear away the heritage buildings such as the Plough Inn, Greyscourt (Collins Place) or the Allgas Energy building, some of which were then looking a little derelict. The government had announced with some pride that a casino and a ‘world trade centre’ would be built on the site. The political problem for the government, however, was that Brisbane people now felt the site was ‘theirs’ and in future should be reserved for public uses (including a parkland setting) to allow a social and cultural precinct to emerge. Denver Beanland, with a background in Brisbane local government, pushed for better planning and for less intensity in the types of commercial development that were being proposed. Finally, on 13 April 1989, after ‘six untidy months of political dawdling, political indecision and political cronyism’, the Southbank Corporation Bill was introduced to redevelop the site in a sensitive manner (*QPD* 1989:vol. 312, p. 5019).

## The man with the plan—but incapable of delivering

Ahern was keen to distinguish his government from his immediate predecessor’s and used economic planning as a way to indicate to the business community and the electorate that he was making a new start and was addressing some of the shortcomings of the former regime. He had introduced some modernising legislation while he was the Minister for Primary Industries, relying on a process of seeking good advice and then providing political backing. This was to be his approach to economic planning and to public sector reform (see Wanna 1995; Reynolds 2002).

Ahern had committed himself to making orchestrated economic planning the leitmotiv of his government, insisting from the outset that ‘economic development will remain a keynote of this Government. The centre-piece will be a State economic development strategy’ (*QPD* 1987:vol. 307, p. 4805). The

political difficulty for him was how to craft a document that provided a coherent strategy without being too critical of the previous administration. He began to criticise, sometimes obliquely, the Bjelke-Petersen government's fascination with ad hoc developmentalism, its obsession with the agricultural industries and absence of any effective planning strategies for growth or to respond to economic challenges. The Queensland economy was still heavily dependent on mining, the processing of agricultural products, tourism and a diverse services sector, but it was not sufficiently diversifying or embracing new economic opportunities.

Ahern tried to mobilise commitment to his own agenda, calling it a 'vision of excellence'—an overarching vision meant to provide a guide to cabinet decision making and offer direction to the local business community. He was personally committed to the notion of embracing a vision but appeared less concerned with the substantive content of the strategy. It was important the government had a vision to show; what it should contain was left to the experts. The driving force behind the strategy was Doug Rowell, Ahern's senior economic adviser and head of the government's Economic Planning Committee (consisting of seven top businessmen), who convinced the Premier of the need for a comprehensive strategy document. Rather than produce an in-house document, the government chose to use external consultants to assess the strengths and weakness of the economy and recommend future planning priorities. Two consulting firms (Stanford Research and Strategies Proprietary Limited) were asked to produce a report from which the strategy would be devised. They were paid \$400 000 and delivered a secret report, *Building on Strength*, in late 1988, relying heavily on statistical analysis. The report contained some ideas for future growth but also contained some politically sensitive comments—such as that unemployment remained a problem, real incomes were declining and job growth occurred in the low-wage sector. It reflected poorly on the previous administration and accordingly was never released publicly (Wanna 1995:128).

Instead, a more cosmetically appealing, glossy strategy, *Quality Queensland—Building on Strength: A vision and strategy for achievement*, was released in December 1988. It appeared as if the committee could not quite agree on the main message—or opted to include as many buzzwords in the document as possible. It committed the government to adopting a 'market facilitation' approach, based on liberalisation, infrastructural provision, public sector enhancement and a new commitment to 'quality' to provide a powerful focus for future innovation (indeed, a professorship in 'quality' was sponsored at one of the universities, although no-one really knew what that meant). Ten areas were identified as part of an implementation program under headings of: the provision of economic infrastructure, the development of human resources, finance availability, commercialisation of technologies, entrepreneurship, low-tax attractiveness,

regional development, natural resource management, developing international business links and the adoption of a strategic approach by government itself. Two new advisory committees were formalised—the Economic Planning Committee and a new private sector body designed to have strategic input, the Private Sector Economic Advisory Committee (PRISEAC)—and weekly announcements were promised. A bill to create ‘free enterprise zones’ in the state (initially around Cairns but later extended to most of the state!) was introduced as a way of luring cheaper manufacturing producers and technology-based firms (but was labelled as ‘grossly fraudulent’ by Casey). For a while, the government packaged good economic news items, such as when the Industries Minister, Rob Borbidge, announced that under Ahern more than 50 new companies had been attracted to the state (*QPD* 1988:vol. 309, p. 93). These were, however, not to last.

To push the strategic approach within government, Ahern established an integrated system of cabinet committees, intended to provide better coordination and consider policy in detail before bringing proposals forward for final cabinet consideration. He established committees overseeing economic planning, social planning, technology and infrastructural planning. The cabinet committees soon struck problems, however, as they were not essentially decision-making bodies, so ministers lost interest, and Ahern’s ministers were not used to such collegial forms of policy development. His ministers did not share Ahern’s obvious enthusiasm for his strategic architecture. After a few months, ministers began to waver in their attendance, with some actively boycotting them, and the weekly announcements faded away. Public reaction to the strategy was lukewarm, if not negative in some quarters of the National Party. Doug Rowell was dismissed in early 1989, attempting to resuscitate the Quality Queensland strategy by employing a PR consultant on \$2500 a day to sell the strategy to government departments and the local business community. After 15 months of effort, the ‘strategy’ could not be delivered; it all seemed an expensive public relations exercise.

Ahern attempted to link the strategy with his first budget, in September 1988, claiming the budget was a ‘document of confidence that charts a course to take the fastest growing State in Australia into the nineties and through to the new century’, but the spending measures taken were largely the traditional ones of more police, more hospital staff, more prison officers and spending on TAFE to assist youth training (*QPD* 1988:vol. 309, p. 727). To criticisms that the presentation of information in the new budget documents was ‘unfathomable’ and ‘confuse[s] and obfuscate[s] much more than they make clear’, Goss argued the annual economic statement was ‘a replay of [Ahern’s] predecessor’s’ budgets;

and, accusing the government of being 'lethargic', said: 'if Ahern was a doctor he would have no patient left. He dithers for so long in his diagnosis that he fails to notice that in the meantime his patient has died' (*QPD* 1988:vol. 309, p. 771).

One politically significant aspect to emerge from the economic deliberations was, however, the contentious issue of daylight saving. Brisbane and Gold Coast businesses had long been lobbying for the state or the south-eastern quarter to go over to summer time in step with New South Wales, and used the opportunity of the strategic planning process to insist the government comply with their wishes. Ahern had some sympathy for their regional concerns (especially those businesses with interstate connections or engaged in tourism) but wavered in his support, knowing the idea of daylight saving was anathema to the bush constituency. His on-again, off-again commitment to daylight saving would run through to late 1989, when he announced a further trial of the idea; but by then his Premiership was under siege and the issue merely inflamed opposition to his leadership from among his party colleagues.

## **The Barambah by-election: the prized seat falls to the Citizen's Electoral Council**

The resignation of Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen in the super-safe seat of Barambah was an early test for the new administration. The by-election was arranged for 16 April 1988. It was not expected that the government would lose the seat, but in a display of outright defiance the voters elected Trevor Perrett, a breakaway candidate from the far-right Citizen's Electoral Council (CEC), a conservative populist movement influenced by the US conspiracy theorist Lyndon La Rouche. The result highlighted the enormous volatility of the times within the conservative side of politics and was a slap in the face to the Nationals, who regarded Barambah as part of their heartland.

Only four candidates contested the election: the dour and earnest Shire President of Kingaroy, Warren Truss, stood for the Nationals; John Lang for the ALP; Kevin Polzin as a 'New Country Party' candidate; and Trevor Perrett, a former National and councillor with the Cattlemen's Union of Australia, but standing as a CEC representative. In effect, three conservative candidates vied to take the seat, with much of the local politics being about the need to recreate a new conservative movement closer to the people to replace the older, more compromised party. While Truss received 41.27 per cent of the primary vote, Perrett, coming from nowhere, won a massive 31.59 per cent on the first ballot; Labor's Lang captured just 17.65 per cent, while Polzin trailed with just 9.48 per cent. When the preferences of the two lowest candidates were distributed, there was a strong anti-National drift apparent. Perrett won the seat comfortably on

a two-party preferred basis, receiving 54.11 per cent support to the Nationals' 45.89 per cent. Interestingly, a massive 89 per cent of Labor's preferences went to the CEC candidate rather than to their traditional enemy, the Nationals. In Perrett's maiden speech, he paid tribute to Bjelke-Petersen, saying he and Flo were 'institutions in my area' (*QPD* 1988:vol. 309, p. 191). After eight months in the Parliament, Perrett ceased being a CEC member and rejoined the Nationals in December 1988, restoring Ahern's numbers in the Chamber for a few months before the Speaker, Lin Powell, resigned and left the Parliament.

## **The beginning of the Fitzgerald fallout in 1988: a 'tiger by the tail'**

As the Fitzgerald investigators began to probe and public hearings began from late July 1987, it was clear that the police had three significant sets of problems: endemic corruption in certain sections of the organisation; politicisation at the senior levels and among some specialist units such as the Special Branch; and growing doubts as to the capacity of the police to operate as an effective modern force. The Fitzgerald team of 'untouchables' would investigate all three dimensions of these problems. More importantly, the royal commission was provided with the mandate, the resources and the wherewithal to expose the full extent of corruption. The original terms of reference were extended on two further occasions to broaden its powers (24 June 1987 and 25 August 1988).

It at first appeared as though senior police would remain tight-lipped and wait for the initial enthusiasm of the inquiry to dissipate. As Fitzgerald (1989:3) himself noted, the 'general expectation was that the inquiry would be brief and ineffectual, and was primarily a device to ease the political pressure on the Government'. The Commissioner of Police, Terry Lewis, the first witness to give evidence at the public hearings, spoke of the difficulties police faced in enforcing the law against illegal brothel operators, although he evaded the issues of kickbacks, bribery and graft. Police hopes of a cover-up were, however, soon dashed. Under the intense spotlight of forensic investigators and media scrutiny, the police conspiracy of silence broke down. Assistant Commissioner, Graeme Parker, when confronted with evidence of his own corruption in a car park, turned crown witness and provided a detailed confession of the full extent of the web of corruption. He named Lewis as an officer who regularly accepted bribes. It was not just a case of a few 'rotten apples' that had fallen to temptation; rather what was discovered was an organised crime ring, established and nurtured within the police force, intent on profiteering from percentage kickbacks from illegal activities, extending to the very top levels of the force and enjoying political protection.

As the nefarious web began to unravel, a number of senior police chose to resign, while others were stood down pending further investigations into their conduct. Those officers resigning were doing so in order to be entitled to claim their superannuation payments, rather than risk being charged with official misconduct (and forfeiting their pensions). Wayne Goss indicated in March 1988 that in the first seven months of the inquiry, one deputy commissioner and one assistant commissioner, nine superintendents and 12 inspectors had all taken early retirement or resigned from the force. He asked why the government was not closing the door on corrupt police who were availing themselves of this loophole. He called for immediate legislation to be introduced to the Parliament to prevent such payouts to corrupt police. The government did finally respond by introducing two pieces of legislation: the first in April 1988 preventing police who faced criminal proceedings from benefiting from their superannuation, but only after many police had resigned under the old arrangements; and the other in August 1988 seeking to recover superannuation benefits paid out to any public official who was later convicted of corruption or misconduct. Ahern confirmed in September 1988 that 78 police had voluntarily retired, 97 had resigned, four had been dismissed and one had been discharged since July 1987 (*QPD* 1988:vol. 309, p. 1037).

When Lewis was named adversely, he was at first stood down, in September 1987, pending further inquiries. Again, Goss wanted to know why the government had agreed to make a superannuation lump-sum payment despite knowing of the allegations. Lewis denied any involvement but mounting evidence of his wrongdoing was forthcoming. The problems for Lewis intensified in a most dramatic way, when his former 'bagman', Jack Herbert (the collector and distributor of the ill-gotten bribes), was arrested and extradited to Queensland (from the United Kingdom, to where he had fled). Herbert was an ex-policeman who had spent much of his career in the Licensing Branch and 'collecting' for Lewis, who had himself been a former 'bagman' for Commissioner Frank Bischof in the 1950–60s. Once Herbert was given conditional indemnity, he cooperated and provided chapter and verse on the entire operation. His evidence 'set beyond doubt the existence of a well-organized network of corruption which had existed and flourished for decades' (Fitzgerald 1989:12). The full extent of the so-called 'Joke' was revealed: detailed records of corrupt payments and bribes from diverse illegal activities—all duly recorded in ledgers—and with corrupt payments according to a pre-agreed formula going to senior police (generally appointed to the Licensing Branch but also crucially including the Commissioner and some of his deputies). How far these payments went was the subject of much speculation, with many believing they went as far as the former Premier.

Police Commissioner Lewis remained suspended during 1987 and early 1988. Herbert's recorded and hearsay evidence against him was damning. His own diaries also indicated the breadth of his misconduct. As Tom Burns recounted in the House in August 1988: 'hon. members know the commissioner fixed ministerial appointments, transferred crooked cops and interfered in [electoral] redistributions. Today we heard that he took bribes. Police Ministers did nothing when told about corrupt cops by their top legal advisers' (*QPD* 1988:vol. 309, p. 352). Bill Gunn told the House in September 1988 that as Police Minister, and after taking legal advice, he had written a letter to Lewis asking him to show cause within seven days why he should not be dismissed for his alleged corrupt activities, and that the letter was hand delivered and received by Lewis in the presence of his daughter. Months of indecision or contention then transpired before the Parliament was presented with a bill to dismiss the Police Commissioner, on 18 April 1989, which was passed through all three stages in one sitting day with only the Liberals objecting to the haste of the deliberation. Lewis was then dismissed. Later, in 1989, he was charged with 23 counts of corruption, perjury and forgery, found guilty and given a 14-year sentence of which he served 10 and a half years, and had his knighthood rescinded in 1993. He continued to maintain his innocence.

As sensational revelations cascaded out of the inquiry about police involvement in organised crime, it appeared that the National Party was in a quandary about how to react or reposition itself. After all, the government had presided over the system and at best had turned a blind eye to the activities now being exposed. Equally sensationally, first Ahern and then Gunn accused Bjelke-Petersen of trying to close down the commission before he was deposed. Although Bjelke-Petersen would later deny in the Parliament and at the Fitzgerald hearings that he had tried to close down the inquiry, Ahern insisted in the Parliament that 'senior counsel was summoned into the presence of the former Premier and was instructed to prepare papers for the termination of the commission of inquiry. That is not an unsubstantiated allegation at all. It is true. It happened. In due course, those matters will surface' (*QPD* 1988:vol. 308, p. 5901). Gunn also made a ministerial statement claiming Bjelke-Petersen had twice attempted to interfere with the inquiry. Gunn said that although the former Premier had been initially 'supportive of an inquiry', the former Premier had said shortly after (on 17 May 1987): 'I'm greatly concerned about this inquiry. I don't think it's a good idea at all'. He continued: 'Well you've got a tiger by the tail and it'll end up biting you.' Gunn apparently said in reply 'it would bite us if we did not do anything about it', and warned that if Bjelke-Petersen tried to cancel the inquiry he would resign.<sup>4</sup> The second attempt to curtail the commission,

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4 Goss questioned Gunn in April about whether the former Premier had tried to take over the Police portfolio in order to end the inquiry (following newspaper reports to this effect), but Gunn merely referred the Opposition Leader back to his earlier ministerial statement.

according to Gunn, took place in August when he was absent from Brisbane and the former Premier had 'summoned a Queen's Counsel to inquire of ways in which the Fitzgerald inquiry may be shortened or expedited in some way'. When Gunn returned to Brisbane, he saw the QC, who confirmed 'what had transpired', saying that Bjelke-Petersen had requested an Executive Council minute be prepared, but that the QC had advised against 'taking any action which shortened or in any way interfered with the inquiry'. Gunn's account corroborated Ahern's version of events, with Gunn indicating he had 'made this statement to ensure that hon. members as well as the public are informed of the true position' (*QPD* 1988:vol. 308, pp. 5955-6).<sup>5</sup>

On virtually every sitting day of parliament, Labor asked questions about the progress of the Fitzgerald investigations and what the government was doing in response and what it planned to do. Three senior ministers (Ahern, Gunn and Clauson) all gave assurances that the inquiry had the government's full support, that additional resources would be provided, that a deputy commissioner was warranted, that the inquiry's terms of reference could be widened at the commissioner's request and that cabinet confidentiality would be waived to allow ministers and former ministers to provide evidence (releasing them from the oaths of secrecy to the extent necessary to answer questions put by the commission). Some other Nationals, however, seemed concerned primarily with the cost of the Fitzgerald Inquiry. After six months of inquiry, Max Menzel (NP, Mulgrave, and a supporter of Lane) asked a hostile multipart question to the Premier. He asked what was the total cost of the inquiry to date, how much had Commissioner Fitzgerald been paid, how much had been spent on legal counsel, how many people had been charged and how did the release of Lewis's diaries contribute to investigating brothels and illegal casinos? He stated that the legal community was 'receiving a great financial boost to its coffers' and was trying to 'keep the inquiry going at taxpayers' expense with no results'. The Premier confirmed that \$2 976 217.93 had been spent on the inquiry to 22 March, that \$433 500 had been paid to Fitzgerald, more than \$1 million had been spent on legal counsel, no criminal charges had yet been made because the commission had yet to report, the diaries were accepted as evidence and he denied the inquiry was being unnecessarily extended. Ahern confirmed, however, that

[t]he inquiry being conducted by Mr Fitzgerald, QC, has the full support of the Queensland Government. All necessary expenses to enable the

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5 The Speaker, Lin Powell, on 21 April 1988, said he had received a communication from 'somebody so aggrieved that I must bring it to the attention of the Parliament'. The letter was from Bjelke-Petersen's solicitors and claimed 'our client denies that during his period of office...he took any action or made any attempt to terminate the Fitzgerald Inquiry...Our client has further instructed us that the statement that he is under investigation by the Fitzgerald Inquiry is, to the best of his knowledge, untrue...Finally, the changes in the Cabinet which he initiated shortly before his retirement were wholly unrelated to the Fitzgerald Inquiry' (*QPD* 1988:vol. 308, p. 6244).

inquiry to successfully complete its investigations will be met by the Government. This is a small price to pay to ensure honesty in all levels of government and the police force. It is quite incorrect to state that the inquiry has produced no results. (*QPD* 1988:vol. 308, p. 5638)

Ahern was between a rock and a hard place. He knew that the inquiry's findings were severely damaging his government, perhaps terminally, but he continued to defend the need for a comprehensive exposé of police corruption and of the imperative of rooting out the culture of corruption in the force. He was also trying, meanwhile, to maintain the support of his ministers and backbench for the inquiry. It was like holding a blowtorch to their heads. Maintaining the support of his party to embrace the proposed remedies would prove to be a much more daunting task and would ultimately cost him his office.

In order to counter the impression that he would not follow through with the spirit of the Fitzgerald reforms and implement the systemic recommendations that were made, Ahern promised in early 1989 to implement all the Fitzgerald recommendations 'lock, stock and barrel'. He also managed to extract the same commitment from the other political leaders: Labor's Wayne Goss and the Liberals' Angus Innes, who were, if truth be known, a little lukewarm to this suggestion. Both tried to quibble rather than embrace a cross-party consensus over the future politics of how to reform the criminal justice system. It was a courageous commitment promoted by the Premier and supported by all sides—especially when the full extent of Fitzgerald's recommendations was not then known. Ahern's promise was given as a genuine commitment to reform the system and root out corruption once and for all. The sometimes hapless Mike Ahern deserves the abiding admiration of Queenslanders for not listening to the backsliders and opportunists around him, politically protecting the inquiry and seeing the process through to its final conclusion. It was the mark of a true political statesman. It showed he was not like earlier premiers whose instinct was to cover up any suggestion of corruption in the ranks.

After making allegations for decades about police corruption in the Parliament (dating back to the era of Commissioner Frank Bischof) and being brushed aside, Labor now had concrete evidence of systemic misconduct. The many allegations made by Kev Hooper between the late 1970s and early 1980s (leaked to him by police disturbed by the stench of corruption and in one case by a former Police Minister, Max Hodges, appalled by mounting evidence but feeling unable to act himself) were subsequently tendered in evidence to the commission. For the first time in many years, the Labor opposition looked as though it had a real issue with which to inflict damage on the government—a government increasingly reeling as the revelations mounted. As Goss and his team (including advisers

Kevin Rudd and Glyn Davis) imposed an intellectual discipline on its alternative policy responses, Labor also sounded like it had real solutions to the enormous complexity of the problems at hand.

## Exit Russ Hinze and Don Lane: more than a whiff of corruption

Expelled from the ministry but now causing mischief on the backbench and with the media, Russ Hinze was feeling the heat of the Fitzgerald investigations, for taking inducements and bribes in exchange for favourable government decisions. Earlier allegations of his involvement in SP bookmaking were unable to be proven. Hinze had by this stage fallen out badly with Ahern, whom he accused of dumping him unnecessarily. When Hinze began sulking and refusing to attend the House, Goss was quick to ask a question without notice of the Premier:

In view of the unacceptable behaviour of Mr Hinze, a member of this House in (1) undermining, by public criticism, the work of the Fitzgerald inquiry and (2) failing to fulfil his obligations as a member of this House, I ask: is the Premier prepared to exercise his authority as Leader of the National Party Government and advise Mr Hinze that his conduct is unacceptable in terms of somebody who seeks to be a Minister and that, unless he ceases his criticism of the Fitzgerald inquiry forthwith and immediately attends the sittings of this Parliament, the Premier is not prepared to reappoint Mr Hinze to the Ministry, irrespective of whether he is cleared by the Fitzgerald inquiry? (*QPD* 1988:vol. 307, p. 5047)

While the Premier accused Goss of 'posturing on this issue', he did acknowledge that 'a former senior Minister in this Government has been named before the Fitzgerald inquiry and this has created a substantial problem for this Government' (*QPD* 1988:vol. 307, p. 5047). He added that he did not need the assistance of the Opposition Leader to deal with this matter.

Hinze made many public attacks on Commissioner Fitzgerald and the inquiry staff, seemingly believing that attack was the best form of defence. In 1988, he was forced to make a formal apology to the commission, after being threatened with contempt unless he complied. The former 'Minister for Everything' did not survive much longer and resigned from the Parliament on 25 May 1988 (and the Parliament was officially informed in August 1988). Hinze appeared before the inquiry in November 1988 to give evidence and subsequently faced charges for receiving money corruptly. He faced a total of eight counts for receiving bribes including from the property developer George Herscu. Hinze died in

June 1991 before he could be brought to trial, while his business partner and associate, Herscu, was charged in 1990 and found guilty of bribing Hinze, and was given a five-year jail sentence.

Don Lane was also mentioned in the Fitzgerald hearings and was later questioned by the commission about his financial affairs and allegations he had been involved in graft and paid bribes from illegal brothel owners. Lane seemed to adopt a strategy of ‘scuttling the entire ship’, implying that if he was going down then so too was everyone else. He told investigators that large amounts of unexplained additional income had come from misusing his ministerial expenses, but claimed such practices were widespread in the ministry. Newspaper headlines proclaimed ‘Lane exposes cabinet rorts’. When Goss asked whether the Premier would establish a second commission of inquiry to investigate ministerial expenses because of the ‘theft from the public purse’, Ahern confidently replied that his actions in leaving Lane out of the cabinet in December 1987 had been vindicated and that Lane’s admission merely confirmed his suspicions. Ahern also stated that Lane was making up ‘untruths’ as a ‘defence’, to which Goss replied: ‘what purpose does that serve? It is still an admission of criminal conduct, is it not?’ (*QPD* 1988:vol. 310, p. 2406). Lane also named Geoff Muntz and Martin Tenni; and Norm Lee, Bill Knox and Neil Turner were also implicated (although they all defended themselves against any allegations). After providing incriminating evidence against himself and others in the government, Lane resigned from the Parliament on 30 January 1989. He would later stand trial and be convicted of falsifying his expense claims and sentenced to 12 months’ jail. Lane managed to have a final personal statement tabled in the Parliament (by Max Menzel), in which he claimed he was largely innocent and that ‘there were a few withdrawals to correspond with my claimed expenditure for tax purposes of my parliamentary electorate and other allowances’. He claimed the ‘humiliation and public scorn that my family and I have suffered...has been devastating. In addition it has been both abhorrent and distressing for me to have had to name former colleagues.’ After listing his achievements as an MP and minister, he concluded: ‘I submit that any fair or balanced assessment of my performance from 1971 to 1988 should take into consideration this abbreviated account of achievements which have created real benefits for Queensland and for Queenslanders’ (*QPD* 1989:vol. 311, pp. 3753–4).

Questions about the inappropriate use of ministerial expenses and departmental funds continued to be raised in the House against some of Ahern’s ministers, such as Leisha Harvey, who was accused of using departmental funds for personal purposes. It was also claimed that Harvey (whose inner-city seat of Greenslopes

was five minutes from the Parliament) had moved to 'live permanently in the Parliamentary Annexe'. In denying she lived there permanently, she responded that

every Minister is entitled to accommodation in the Parliamentary Annexe, and on occasions I, too, stay at the Annexe, usually when Parliament sits late at night, when I have deputations late at night, attend late-night functions in the city, or have an early in the start in the city the following day. (*QPD* 1988:vol. 309, p. 1390)

Harvey would not be the first minister, or the last, to be accused of moving into the annexe to reduce their living costs. In November 1988, however, Goss challenged Ahern in a dispute over ministerial accountability about Harvey's dubious record to date, claiming 'I challenge the Premier to deny that the use of departmental funds by the Minister for Health is standard practice for the Ministry, including himself. The silence is golden. It is the corks in the ears, the blindfold over the eyes and the plaster over the mouth again' (*QPD* 1988:vol. 310, p. 2310). By late 1988, Harvey was being accused constantly of using departmental funds for personal requirements and was quickly becoming a liability. Day after day in the Parliament, a barrage of questions was asked about ministerial expenses and the claiming of inflated (or fictitious) cash advances by ministers (and sometimes just poor record keeping). In the end, Bill Gunn asked the head of the Premier's Department, Eric Finger, to review the procedures, while Ahern belatedly introduced his pecuniary interest and code of conduct for ministers in April 1989, which publicly disclosed the interests of ministers but kept the interests of family members on a confidential register. While the initial code applied to ministers, a second one accompanying it applied to all parliamentarians, as Ahern argued that there was 'no justifiable or substantive reason for limiting such declarations solely to the Ministry' (*QPD* 1989:vol. 312, pp. 4700, 4939). Goss noted that it had taken the Premier a year to deliver and that it was further evidence of dithering. Suddenly, however, many ordinary members were now worried their names would be tarnished.

## **The South Coast and Merthyr by-elections: both body blows to Labor**

With the resignations of the former ministers—first, Russ Hinze, and then Don Lane—from the Parliament, two by-elections were required in 1988–89. Both occasions should have provided a big boost to Labor, in the context of the Fitzgerald revelations and a sense of general disarray within government, but both by-elections produced conservative victories, with the Nationals holding their Gold Coast seat against a serious challenge from the Liberals, and the

Liberals beating off the Nationals to retake their Brisbane seat lost when Lane defected. Both by-elections were devastating for Labor, which suffered a major reversal on the South Coast and could only manage to hold its vote steady at the Merthyr poll.

The by-election for South Coast was held on 28 August 1988. Ten candidates contested the seat. Judy Gamin, a local businesswoman and regional vice-president for the Nationals, stood against the Liberals' Bob Quinn, a local teacher and director of the Gold Coast Educational Centre. Labor ran with Dallas Watson. The maverick conservative and former Nationals MP (for Callide) Lindsay Hartwig stood as a CEC representative, and Bruce Whiteside, an anti-Japanese foreign investment campaigner, ran as a so-called 'Australian independent'. One Democrat candidate stood and four other independents also ran, one of whom, Philip Black, was an expelled former National who campaigned with the endorsement of Joh Bjelke-Petersen.

The primary vote produced a three-way split, with the Nationals' Gamin narrowly leading Quinn by 30.43 per cent to 28.89 per cent. Labor trailed in third place with just 22.85 per cent; it had weathered a 7.42 swing against it on the primary vote. The other seven candidates received only handfuls of votes, with the exception of Black, who captured 7.92 per cent. Although Quinn managed to close the gap on his National challenger, Gamin hung on and won the seat by just 144 votes. With most of the independents being conservative, and Labor and Democrat preferences going towards the Nationals' candidate (55 per cent of ALP preferences went to Gamin), the National candidate took the seat with 50.38 per cent to the Liberals' 49.62 per cent. Gamin became only the eleventh woman ever to be elected to the Assembly. When she presented her first speech, she avoided any mention of Hinze, but reported how horrified the people of the South Coast were at the sordid evidence mounting up from the Fitzgerald Inquiry, saying she was 'totally behind the Ahern administration in its resolve to fully implement whatever recommendations are made by Commissioner Fitzgerald' (*QPD* 1988:vol. 309, p. 613).

The Merthyr by-election was called for 13 May 1989. The election took place not just in the aftermath of the Fitzgerald hearings; this electorate, based on the trendy inner-city areas of New Farm and Fortitude Valley, was the epicentre of much of the organised crime and illegal brothels. Eight candidates chose to contest the seat, representing a broad mix of society and a range of talents. Four stood as independents. Crime boss Gerry Bellino, who had been named in the terms of reference establishing the Fitzgerald Inquiry, nominated as a mark of defiance. He was accompanied by Nigel Powell, a former undercover policeman who had contributed to the 'Moonlight State' program and had been a witness to the inquiry. Also standing for notoriety was Tanya Wilde, the first transsexual political candidate to run for office. Another local independent,

I. Ciadamidaro, completed the set. All the main parties (the Liberals, Labor, the Nationals and Democrats) contested the seat. Santo Santoro was a well-known local Liberal identity and branch activist, who had narrowly lost to Lane in 1986. He was challenged by Barbara Dawson from the Labor Party and by Betty Byrne-Henderson, a local businesswoman, who attempted to retain the Nationals' short-term hold on the seat. The Democrat candidate was John Brown.

The campaign naturally highlighted the issues of corruption and misconduct, but other issues crept in—such as local facilities and violence against homosexuals. In the final vote, Wilde received 3.14 per cent of the vote and out-pollled Brown, Bellino and the last independent. Powell received a respectable 7.46 per cent of the vote. The Nationals lost half their vote, dropping to 16.02 per cent. Labor scored 32.73 (a gain of only 0.23 per cent). The Liberals were the biggest winners, polling 35.91 per cent in their old seat. On a two-party preferred vote, Santoro took the seat for the Liberals by 56.95 per cent to Labor's 43.05 per cent. To disguise the ignominy for Labor, the assistant state secretary, Wayne Swan, attempted to distract media criticism by trying to talk of a 'three-party preferred' outcome—a nonsense concept. When Bellino lost his deposit, he announced 'it's been a long, hard campaign, and I have come to the conclusion that I'd rather be called a crime boss than a hypocritical politician' (*Courier-Mail*, 15 May 1989).

## Ahern refreshes his ministry

In early 1989, after merely a year in office, Ahern chose to refresh his cabinet. Keeping the ministry at 18, he appointed himself (in addition to his previous responsibilities) as Minister for State Development. He dropped the beleaguered Leisha Harvey (increasingly the target of opposition attacks) from the cabinet and promoted the newcomer Craig Sherrin. If changes of personnel were minimal, up to nine ministers were, however, reshuffled into other portfolios or had their responsibilities extensively restructured by Ahern. Ivan Gibbs went from Transport to Health; Peter McKechnie went from Family Services to Transport, and Sherrin was appointed to the Family Services portfolio. Responsibility for Police was moved from Bill Gunn to Russell Cooper, who was also given Emergency Services and Administrative Services. The job of overseeing Corrective Services went to the Attorney-General, Paul Clauson, while Tourism was added to Rob Borbidge's duties. Ahern's second ministry consisted of

- Premier, Treasurer and Minister for State Development and the Arts: Mike Ahern

- Deputy Premier and Minister for Public Works, Housing and Main Roads: Bill Gunn
- Minister for Health: Ivan Gibbs
- Minister for Finance and Minister Assisting the Premier and Treasurer (and Leader of the House): Brian Austin
- Minister for Land Management: Bill Glasson
- Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Affairs: Vince Lester
- Minister for Mines and Energy: Martin Tenni
- Minister for Primary Industries: Nev Harper
- Minister for Environment, Conservation and Tourism: Geoff Muntz
- Minister for Transport: Peter McKechnie
- Minister for Community Services and Ethnic Affairs: Bob Katter
- Minister for Water Resources and Maritime Services: Don Neal
- Minister for Justice and Attorney-General: Paul Clauson
- Minister for Industry, Small Business, Technology and Tourism: Rob Borbidge
- Minister for Local Government and Racing: Jim Randell
- Minister for Police, and Minister for Emergency Services, and Administrative Services: Russell Cooper
- Minister for Education, Youth and Sport: Brian Littleproud
- Minister for Family Services: Craig Sherrin

The second Ahern ministry survived unchanged for just seven months before being restructured again in the context of a deepening political crisis.

## **The tiger that roared: the quest for political accountability**

In early 1989, Tony Fitzgerald was by now ensconced amid realms of transcripts, interviews, evidence, exhibits and submissions the commission had gathered or received, writing up his final report for presentation to the government and the Parliament. The commission's continuing inquiries were being overseen by Fitzgerald's deputies, Judge Patsy Wolfe and the newly appointed Gary Croke QC, to enable Fitzgerald to pay full attention to the crafting of the final report. The need for continuing and further investigations was soon recognised and an 'implementation team' was considered essential and would be recommended by the commissioner when he delivered his report. The implementation team

was established on 6 July 1989 and headed by Peter Forster, who was charged with assisting the reform process and continuing the investigations begun by Fitzgerald but not yet concluded (*QPD* 1989:vol. 321, p. 5555).

Fitzgerald presented the final report to Premier Ahern and the Police Minister, Russell Cooper, on 3 July 1989. It truly was a bombshell. The report noted the commission had held public sittings over 238 days, it had questioned 339 witnesses and had amassed transcripts totalling 21 504 pages and exhibits totalling 2304. The commission had existed for more than 13 months and resulted in a final report of 388 pages. Its major recommendations were for the Parliament to establish two continuing commissions. The first commission was to focus on criminal justice matters (to monitor, review, coordinate and initiate reform in the administration of criminal justice and to continue the investigations emanating from the Fitzgerald Inquiry and discharge those functions not appropriate to be carried out by the police department: civilian oversight, dealing with issues of misconduct and even responsibility for areas of organised crime). The other continuing commission was to specialise in electoral and administrative law and its main ambit would be to 'provide an independent and comprehensive review of administrative and electoral laws and processes' (see Prasser et al. 1990).

The emphasis Fitzgerald placed on electoral reform was something of a surprise, given the terms of reference of the inquiry, but he located administrative accountability within a broader context of political accountability to the Parliament and the electorate. The submission made to the inquiry by the pressure group Citizens For Democracy was particularly persuasive and sections of the final report attested to their influence on the commission. Significantly, these two standing commissions would both report directly to multi-party parliamentary select committees with relevant mandates and expertise.

Although Fitzgerald (1989:127) did not specifically recommend electoral reform or advocate for any proposed changes to the electoral system, he stated in his report:

A fundamental tenet of the established system of parliamentary democracy is that public opinion is given effect by regular, free, fair elections following open debate. A Government in our political system which achieves office by means other than free and fair elections lacks legitimate political authority over that system. This must affect the ability of Parliament to play its proper role in the way referred to in this report. The point has already been made that the institutional culture of public administration risks degeneration if, for any reason, a Government's activities ceased to be moderated by concern at the possibility of losing power.

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.

There is a vital need for the existing electoral boundaries to be examined by an open, independent inquiry as a first step in the rehabilitation of social cohesion, public accountability and respect for authority. Such an inquiry should be conducted by a person or group of people of undoubted integrity whose judgement will be acceptable to all political parties and the general community. It should be allowed to do its task unfettered by predetermined restrictions.

The inquiry must be permitted to reconsider basic assumptions which shape the present electoral boundaries, such as whether there is a genuine justification for a zonal system. If it finds that there is a justification for the present system, it should assess the appropriate zones and what, if any, special considerations ought to apply in different zones. The inquiry must be totally open with public access to the evidence and submissions received by it. It should be given appropriate staff and adequate resources to fulfil its task and it should report directly to Parliament.

In short, Fitzgerald's report delivered the most trenchant critique of the executive's interference in electoral matters, in cold, dispassionate terms and in words that could not easily be discounted. The clarion call to re-evaluate the electoral system was a bolt from the blue. People had expected recommendations about police procedural reform, but the emphasis on political accountability and public legitimacy was totally unexpected. The tiger had roared, and bitten the body politic.

The recommendations for reform of the administration of the police seemed to almost take second place, despite occupying a good half of the final report. Systemic problems with the secretive and repressive police culture and the lack of adequate professional training came in for particular criticism from the investigators. The former Commissioner Ray Whitrod (who had been forced out by Bjelke-Petersen, especially when he insisted Lewis be promoted) had already criticised the intellectual capacities of sections of the police (with his

infamous ‘ning-nongs’ statement about his officers). Bill Gunn echoed this in early 1988 when he expressed the view that ‘Queensland police officers are fat, lazy, pampered and poorly-trained’, leading Goss to question whether he should remain in the portfolio. The Fitzgerald investigators considered the militaristic nature of the ‘force’ was problematic and organisationally dysfunctional, encouraging obsequious behaviour to superiors, blind obedience to orders and a culture of silence. In the final report, Fitzgerald (1989:200) argued: ‘the Queensland Police Force is debilitated by misconduct, inefficiency, incompetence, and deficient leadership.’ A police ‘code’ existed under which it was considered impermissible for police to criticise each other, especially to outsiders, and any breach of the code was punishable internally. Commissioner Fitzgerald detailed exactly how networks of corruption could thrive for decades in such a culture, listing those involved, the amounts of bribes received, from which activities and operators the bribes or payments were collected and to whom they were paid among officialdom. Herbert’s books went back at least 20 years. Under such a police culture, if any whistleblowers had the courage to speak out they risked their careers (and perhaps lives). Hence, police culture had to change and be modernised, while whistleblowers had to be accepted and protected. There was a need for a standing misconduct commission along the model of the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC); there was a need for independent oversight (including parliamentary oversight); and there was a need for a more professional regional structure, and for more educated recruits and university-level training.

Fitzgerald’s report contained many more specific recommendations, such as the abolition of the existing complaints’ tribunal and the various special units (such as the Special Branch and the Licensing Branch) and he also recommended preventative policing, community policing and a list of efficiency measures to streamline operations (such as increased ‘civilianisation’ of administrative work, stopping the use of police vehicles as ‘taxis’ for senior police officers and police patrol cars operating using single officers in the vehicles). He also insisted that to be consistent with a ‘separation of powers’ doctrine, the portfolios of the Attorney-General (with responsibility for crown law and the provision of legal advice to the government) and Justice (courts, prison administration) should be functionally separated.

## **Other allegations of official misconduct in the judiciary**

By the late 1980s, there was considerable speculation that the judiciary had developed unhealthily close links with the government and that certain lawyers

with close connections to the Nationals (or to the police) were favoured in judicial appointments. Police Commissioner Lewis had recorded numerous incidents involving discussions with members of the judiciary and about their suitability to be appointed to particular positions. These issues came before the Fitzgerald Inquiry, which, as part of its investigations into corruption among senior police officers and former ministers, also began to investigate certain matters relating to the appointment of judges and their known associations. There was suspicion that some judges had participated in the cover-up of official misconduct or other corrupt activities. Two serving judges received considerable attention. Among the judiciary, Supreme Court Judge Angelo Vasta and Judge Eric Pratt, from the Police Complaints Tribunal, were both on friendly terms with the government, both were referred to by witnesses and in the case of the former also appeared in Lewis's diaries. Pratt had very close connections with the government and had been appointed earlier to head up the special industrial tribunal set up to oversee the electricity industry after the SEQEB dispute. As Coaldrake (1989) pointed out at the time, the Police Complaints Tribunal was meant to be at 'arm's length' from the police, but its head was a personal friend of the Police Minister, Bill Gunn, and had a special relationship with the Police Commissioner.

With Labor attempting to maintain the heat, Tom Burns took the opportunity to ask the Premier in March 1988, whether

[i]n order to be consistent with the so-called principles which demanded that Messrs Hinze, Lane and Lewis be stood down from their public positions...will the Premier now furnish Parliament with an explanation why the following people have not been stood down following strong allegations of serious impropriety against them: Angelo Vasta of the Supreme Court, Eric Pratt of the District Court and the Police Complaints Tribunal, 'Top level Ted' Lyons of the Mortgage Secondary Market Board and Ron Redmond, the Acting Police Commissioner. (QPD 1988:vol. 307, p. 4981)

Ahern answered that such matters were for consideration, adding that he had discussed issues raised with his ministers and that 'in respect of the allegations in relation to the judiciary, that is a matter for the Attorney-General and the Chief Justice of Queensland' (QPD 1988:vol. 307, p. 4981).

Two weeks later, commenting on a *Sydney Morning Herald* story that the head of the Police Complaints Tribunal, Judge Eric Pratt, was considering accepting an offer of reappointment when his term expired on 11 April, Goss asked the Premier whether such an offer had indeed been made. Ahern was definitive that 'no offer has been made, nor will one be made' (QPD 1988:vol. 308, p. 5377). In the same question time, Nev Warburton also asked Gunn whether he had written in February to Judge Pratt (and the head of the Police Union) offering

them both reappointment to the tribunal. Gunn was then forced to admit he had written to the judge, pleading that such processes were 'perfectly normal' but had been made 'before certain events took place' at the commission of inquiry (*QPD* 1988:vol. 308, p. 5382). Labor continued to keep turning up the heat on Pratt, attacking him in the Parliament, with Bob Gibbs unkindly suggesting that he was known among his colleagues as 'Eric P. Ratt'. Labor believed that as head of the complaints tribunal he had been soft on complaints against police, tending to hose them down to avoid conflict or embarrassment.

Judge Vasta was named adversely in the inquiry hearings largely in relation to allegations of improper influence and a 'special' friendship with the former Police Commissioner, Terry Lewis. After he was named in the inquiry hearings, Judge Vasta was initially stood aside (removed from the Supreme Court's calendar of cases) by order of the Executive Council on 24 October 1988. Vasta wrote to Ahern stating that the allegations against him be referred to a panel of judges. When Ahern prevaricated for a few days, Vasta accused Ahern of having a plan to get rid of him, a claim denied by Ahern as 'grossly offensive'. Believing that the judge had close connections with the Nationals and especially the former Premier, Labor, however, kept up the pressure on Ahern and Vasta through carefully worded questions and repeated goading about the apparent lack of action over the impasse.

The judiciary had not been the primary object of Fitzgerald's inquiry but aspects of concern had arisen almost as collateral damage. The questions raised over both these members of the judiciary posed a dilemma for the Premier. Ahern agreed to accept Vasta's suggestion as a solution to the judicial impasse and, after consultation with the Law Society and Bar Association (but not the opposition), appointed a review tribunal of three retired judges from interstate to consider the appropriateness of Vasta and Pratt to remain members of the judiciary. The tribunal (of Harry Gibbs, George Lush and Michael Helsham) exonerated Pratt of any suspicion of misconduct (as did the final report of the Fitzgerald Inquiry) but found inconsistencies in Judge Vasta's affairs, especially in his taxation records. He was summonsed to appear before the bar of the Parliament on 7 June 1989, and duly appeared.<sup>6</sup> He made a lengthy speech in his own defence lasting for almost three hours, tabling many supporting documents and waging attacks against Fitzgerald, implying there was almost a conspiracy against him, perhaps even because of his Sicilian background. When he first appeared at his 'ceremonial beheading', he said: 'I come here with a great deal

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6 The Parliament was recalled for a special sitting day (30 May 1989) to consider a motion to require Judge Vasta to appear before the Assembly to show cause why he should not be removed from office. Ahern read out a list of the judge's largely commercial 'deceptions' and 'false evidence' as well as his allegations that the Chief Justice, the Attorney-General and Commissioner Fitzgerald QC had conspired to injure him. Ahern estimated that the cost of bringing the Parliament back for the special sitting inviting Vasta to appear cost \$39 000 (*QPD* 1989:vol. 312, pp. 5146-57).

of trepidation. This is a fear not generated by my having to speak to you but because I have a distinct apprehension that most of you consider that my fate has been sealed' (*QPD* 1989:vol. 312, p. 5216). He complained of the 'lynch-mob mentality' in which an alleged law-breaker would be rounded up and told 'we will give him a fair trial but hang him afterwards'. There was some truth in his views, as some of the members admitted that while they listened to Vasta's case nothing could change their minds. The government was also interested in making an example of Vasta. The Assembly then debated his removal from the Supreme Court on a motion moved by the Premier and, after a division on a tactical matter (whether to proceed with the dismissal of the judge or delay the vote for another week), the Parliament agreed without any dissent to remove Judge Vasta from his position. Goss mentioned that some in the opposition had misgivings or doubts and wanted more time to consider the judge's speech, but made clear that he did 'not think that after some reflection I will change my mind' (*QPD* 1989:vol. 312, p. 5271). Angus Innes added that he too was not persuaded by the judge's submission. The Vasta trial was an event rare in the annals of parliamentary history, when the Parliament sits effectively as a higher court deciding on the fate of judicial officers.

## **Despite the disarray, the election is no 'foregone conclusion'**

Despite the intense media coverage of the Fitzgerald revelations involving police, the judiciary, crime bosses and politicians, it was not clear whether the Labor opposition was benefiting from the fallout. Ahern was winning kudos in many quarters for his tough preparedness to fix the previous problems of endemic corruption and for his openness to reforms and different policy ideas. Meanwhile under his watch, Labor had lost three by-elections in a row and performed particularly badly in the most recent Merthyr by-election. Commentators were pessimistic about whether Labor could ever form government. The ABC's Quentin Dempster argued in May 1989 that it was not a 'foregone conclusion' that Labor would benefit from the disarray and the entrenched corruption. He pointed to a list of appreciated reforms that Ahern had introduced, saying:

Queensland has been blessed with a pecuniary interests register, a parliamentary public accounts committee, a public works committee; Sir Terence Lewis has been summarily dismissed by a special Enabling Act of Parliament; the Premier has announced he will personally wield the sword for the ceremonial beheading of Mr Justice Vasta before the parliamentary mob on June 7...A change of government is possible, which is more than objectively could be said six months ago. Now the

ALP has embarked on a television campaign to discredit the only other option—a return to a National–Liberal coalition. This is smart politics and recognises the dilemma still facing Queensland voters. (*Sunday Mail*, 21 May 1989)

Dempster went on to claim that if the Merthyr result were any guide, Labor would remain locked firmly in opposition. He wrote that the political analyst Dr Peter Coaldrake had estimated that according to recent polling and taking into account the South Coast and Merthyr by-elections, the result of the next state election would be the Nationals finishing with 31–36 seats, the Liberals increasing to 15–18 and the ALP falling short of government with 38–40. The historian Ross Fitzgerald had also predicted that Labor would remain on the opposition benches for another two elections (that is, not form government until 1995 at the earliest) (see *QPD* 1989:vol. 312, p. 5556). Dempster finally reasoned that ‘with the soft cushion of a coalition to fall back on to ensure he holds the premiership, Mike Ahern has a good chance of surviving ‘89’. In retrospect, these prognoses appear flawed, but when the predictions were made they were probably realistic. Labor was still polling only 42 per cent in opinion polls in early October. When Coaldrake’s critical book *Working the System* was published in July 1989, Ahern dismissed it as the work of a ‘card-carrying member of the Labor Party’, who along with Goss and ‘his mate on the 7.30 Report [Quentin Dempster, was] a co-conspirator’ aiming to bring down the government (*QPD* 1989:vol. 313, pp. 138–9).

## Parliamentary reform arrives at last

Legislation to establish a Public Accounts Committee (PAC) was introduced in the Parliament in October 1988, with the delay perhaps indicating it was not the burning priority some in the new government had asserted. Nevertheless, reform was finally under way. Ahern stated that it was ‘with a great deal of pride and pleasure that I introduce this historic piece of legislation which I have called for on the floor of this Parliament’ (*QPD* 1988:vol. 309, p. 1159). He claimed the Parliament would now be able to review government with more independence and be able to play a more significant role in the government of the state. The government’s proposal for a local PAC had, however, significantly weaker powers than those of comparable jurisdictions. For instance, under Ahern’s proposal, ministers retained a veto over releasing information or documents, departments were not compelled to cooperate with the committee and the Auditor-General was unable to brief or cooperate more generally with the committee. Although the new PAC was finally welcomed by the Labor and Liberal Parties, the opposition’s main concern at the time was whether the committee would be able to investigate ministerial expenses. Goss labelled the

PAC, overall, ‘token legislation’, which was a ‘cheap charade’, rather than the openness and accountability that the people were promised (*QPD* 1988:vol. 310, p. 2403). He suggested a minor amendment to a clause that he circulated and which the Premier indicated he was prepared to accept. Goss was allowed to move the minor amendment, which was accepted. Ahern also volunteered that the government was prepared to review the PAC in the future and if it was not working then he would ‘ensure it operates in the traditional mode’ (*QPD* 1988:vol. 310, p. 2473). Less courtesy was extended to the Liberal leader, who suggested that the chair of the PAC should not be from a party or parties ‘from which the Executive is formed’ (that is, it should be a non-governmental chair as practised in the United Kingdom and New Zealand). His amendment was defeated with both the government and opposition voting against and only the Liberals voting for this proposal (losing eight votes to 68). Terry Mackenroth said in the debate that ‘Mr Hewitt should have been invited back today to make a speech from the pedestal. That would have been a great thing’ (*QPD* 1988:vol. 310, p. 2442). Hewitt had, of course, been a tireless proponent of a PAC from the 1960s. The first PAC was established in November 1988 by the Parliament with the inaugural members being Gil Alison (chair), Des Booth, Clem Campbell, Huan Fraser, Ken Hayward, Len Stephan and Terry White. It had been an arduous journey and a long time coming!

The PAC bill was followed by the Parliamentary Services Bill, which sought to give the management of the Parliament a greater degree of independence from the executive and to allow for a tripartite Parliamentary Services Commission to determine its internal management. Interestingly, the legislation to introduce a companion public works committee was not introduced until April 1989 and was far less contentious even though its range of investigatory powers would be equivalent to the PAC’s.

## Mired amid further controversies

Much of the Ahern government’s legislative agenda in 1988–89 was driven by reactions to the Fitzgerald Inquiry and by specific requirements advised by lawyers associated with the commission in the Attorney-General’s Department. Many of these acts were technical clarifications making special provision or clarifying points of law. The government was almost arm-twisted to deliver the statutes, and many second reading speeches from the relevant minister began with phrases such as ‘we have been informed or advised that...[this matter or that matter] needs to be clarified or amended’. The opposition felt the bills were being railroaded through the Chamber. The *Criminal Code* was amended; the Parliament passed the *Parliamentary Judges Commission of Inquiry Act*, the *Commission of Inquiry Act Amendment Act*, the *Crimes (Confiscation of Profits)*

*Act*, the *Commissioner of Police (Vacation of Office) Act*, even the *Hon. Angelo Vasta (Validation of Office) Act* and the Commission of Inquiry Continuation Bill to establish the continuing 'implementation unit'. Together, they formed a heady brew of legislative issues attempting to steer the way from intrigue to integrity. At the presentation of these bills, the issue of corruption constantly surfaced in the political arena as well as what the government was proposing to do about the various matters. On occasion, bills would be announced before they were printed and circulated to members, leading to bewilderment from the Labor or Liberal Parties as to what they were meant to discuss (having had only the minister's second reading speech to go on) (for example, *QPD* 1989:vol. 312, p. 4680).

While the Ahern government generally sought to encourage economic growth, there were limits to its enthusiasm. Sections of the National Party (especially the Gold Coast developers) were increasingly anxious over an upsurge in the foreign takeover of Queensland assets, especially Japanese interests purchasing land, hotels, office buildings and commercial sites. The local-developer brigade was worried it would never get the assets back and that profits would go offshore. The anti-Japanese investment campaign was none too subtle with local lobby groups forming (such as the nationalistic 'Heart of a Nation' group) and photographs appeared in popular newspapers showing the Gold Coast strip covered with arrows falling from the sky, each one indicating a Japanese-owned high-rise. An anti-Japanese candidate had stood in the South Coast by-election and attracted publicity for his cause. In October 1988, a Foreign Land Ownership Register Bill had been introduced, with some support from the opposition (both Bill Eaton and Keith De Lacy welcomed the bill), and was passed at that time, intending the register to begin in December 1988. This was cancelled, however, due to negotiations (after the bill was passed) with the Law Society and various financial industry bodies. Amendments were apparently required. In March 1989, a row in cabinet was reported over whether to proceed with the register, which was perceived by Japanese investors as an impediment to invest. The government's indecisiveness was commented on in the Parliament even though it appeared that only the Liberals opposed the intent of the proposed register. After amendment legislation was passed in March 1989, the Foreign Land Ownership Register finally came into effect in April 1989. The government also moved to repeal the *Queensland International Tourist Centre Agreement Act* (the infamous special legislation allowing Iwasaki to develop 8000 ha of prime coastline at Yeppoon; see Chapter 11).

The government was also still toying with the idea of adopting daylight saving, at least for parts of the state, but had made no firm announcement. Ahern was attracted to a trial as a way of gauging popular support and Nationals from the Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast and metropolitan area were constantly pushing the

issue. Even the idea of a trial, however, was contentious outside the south-east. Unable to decide, the Premier wavered between going ahead and cancelling the idea. Meanwhile, in the Parliament, Goss moved a motion without notice urging the adoption of a daylight saving trial and was defeated in a vote by the government 38 votes to 45. In an attempt to create a short-circuit, Ahern announced unilaterally that a trial of daylight saving would occur during the summer months of 1989–90 and introduced the Daylight Saving Bill on 6 September 1989. To some of Ahern's wavering supporters, this was the last straw.

## Another accident waiting to happen? Speaker Powell resigns and Speaker Lingard returns

Speaker Lin Powell resigned from the National Party on 3 May 1989 (declaring himself an independent), then spectacularly, he resigned from the Speakership on 5 July and from the Parliament altogether on 31 July 1989. He had never supported the Ahern administration, but the catalyst for his resignation appeared trivial, although both sides saw some deeper skulduggery behind the scenes. The lead-up to the incident began innocuously. Tom Burns had been stirring Ahern over the government's response to the AIDS issue and asked the Premier whether he had anything to do with the 'homosexual lobby' trying to embarrass him. Ahern answered that he had had nothing to do with the homosexual lobby. Burns believed from media reports that Ahern had had some discussions with the homosexual lobby and in particular the AIDS Council of Queensland. He then wrote to the Speaker raising as a matter of privilege the suggestion that Ahern had misled the Parliament. As the Assembly was preparing to debate the *Fitzgerald Report* on 5 July 1989, the Speaker told the House that the matter of privilege was not a matter for him to determine, 'but rather one that should be referred to the privileges committee', whereupon Goss rose and moved that the complaint be so referred. The government was placed in an awkward position, not wanting the Premier referred to the committee but with the opposition backing the Speaker's preferred course of action. The government used its numbers to defeat Goss's motion 36–44, thus in effect voting against its own nominee as Speaker, who had now turned independent. Powell then informed the House that as a result of the vote he had no option but to resign. Two hours later, after the Clerk read out Powell's resignation, Goss immediately renominated Powell for the Speaker's job, but Ahern moved that Kevin Lingard (who was Speaker for nine months in Bjelke-Petersen's last year in office) take the chair (*QPD* 1989:vol. 312, p. 5430).

The debate was on; the gloves were off. For the next two hours, the Parliament indulged in a senseless series of allegations and counter-allegations before

putting the motion to confirm Lingard in the post. Even Powell joined the debate—now as an ordinary member—denying he had conspired to resign and saying he would have preferred to go to the next election as Speaker rather than as an ‘independent backbencher’ (although shortly after this he decided to quit politics altogether). After a debate lasting almost 12 hours and finishing at 3.35 am the next day, the vote for Lingard was 42 to 40 with one informal. Lingard became only the second Speaker to hold the position for two non-consecutive terms.

The events leading up to Speaker Powell’s resignation were somewhat perplexing. That sitting day, the Parliament was due to debate the *Fitzgerald Report* for the first time. Powell had come into the House and in effect ruled that the privileges matter against the Premier be referred to the privileges committee for investigation. The opposition seemed primed to support his chosen course. Ahern seemed to be ready to nominate Lingard to replace him. And the media had been tipped off beforehand that something was going to happen. It also transpired that the former Premier, Bjelke-Petersen, had attended Parliament House and had lunch with Powell and Ted Lyons (leading to certain suggestions they could have put Powell up to it—but he had already told Burns and some colleagues before the lunch). A furious Ahern claimed that the stunt was another ‘Kingaroy cow yard conspiracy’ cooked up by the vengeance-seeking former Premier and Powell and with Goss and Innes as co-conspirators. Bill Gunn called it ‘one of the most shonky, shabby stunts ever brought before this House’ by the non-government parties wasting time rather than debating Fitzgerald. Goss, however, accused the government of not standing by their Speaker (who was increasingly acting as an independent because of his animosity towards the government) and of trying to engineer his replacement with a more amenable chair. When Powell announced his resignation, Goss asserted, ‘we all saw the National Party Whip, Mr FitzGerald come into the House, go up to Austin and say “what are we going to do?” Austin gave the orders and Ahern fell into line.’ He claimed government members were now going red in the face realising what they had done. He claimed the object was ‘to get rid of an independent Speaker so that the Government can control the debate on the Fitzgerald report’ (*QPD* 1989:vol. 312, pp. 5431–5).

Then, the next day, almost as an afterthought, the Assembly conducted a further 10-hour debate on the *Fitzgerald Report*. Ahern described it as a black day for Queensland when the Labor and Liberal Parties conspired to get rid of the Speaker, but welcomed the *Fitzgerald Report* with ‘pride and pleasure’, claiming it was ‘the most far-reaching report ever to have been resourced and obtained by any Government in the whole of the British Commonwealth’ (*QPD* 1989:vol. 312, p. 5565). For the Parliament, however, it was an anticlimax.

Ah! Politics, politics!

## The final discord on electoral reform

The pronounced emphasis Fitzgerald placed on political legitimacy and electoral accountability placed the Ahern government in a quandary. Ahern had personally given an assurance to implement the Fitzgerald recommendations ‘lock, stock and barrel’. Now, some five months away from the next state election, Fitzgerald had called for ‘free and fair elections’ and specifically recommended an independent inquiry be undertaken, unfettered by any predetermined restrictions (that is, no statutorily imposed zonal system or other forms of malapportioning votes). Fitzgerald had not said the zonal system was unjustified or that one vote, one value should prevail; merely that the present system was widely questioned and was in need of fundamental review. It is highly unlikely any serious review involving public submissions and public hearings could be completed before the election was due, let alone any redistribution occur before the poll.

Ahern attempted to catch his Labor and Liberal opponents unawares. His audacious solution (provided to him, unintentionally, by the Citizens For Democracy) was to extend the present Parliament by up to six months through a special referendum, ostensibly to allow an electoral redistribution to take place before the next election. The Constitutional (Extension of Duration of Parliament) Bill was introduced in July 1989 (along with an accompanying bill to hold a constitutional referendum) with the intended date for holding the referendum being 14 October. The Premier hoped the proposal would gain tripartisan support. In effect, he was prepared to gamble and offer a political deal; would his opponents accept the challenge? For the Labor and Liberal Parties, the proposal offered the prospect of fairer electoral boundaries (perhaps, but certainly not guaranteed); for Ahern, he stood to gain more time to both implement those aspects of Fitzgerald he chose and put Fitzgerald behind him and focus on other issues. The referendum required the endorsement of each major party otherwise it would not succeed. Both Labor and the Liberals were wary. They did not necessarily fully trust Ahern to stand by his words; after all, the government would remain in control of the rules of the game and could decide which aspects of any future recommendations it would adopt. If, for instance, a review came back with the recommendation to have electoral equity, there were concerns Ahern could ignore such recommendations and some time in 1990 go to the polls on the old boundaries. Again there was no love lost and deep distrust from all sides.

Goss was the first to come out and proclaim the proposal was a ‘sham’ and that the government was calculating that the referendum would fail (as most do) and that this would then be used to claim that the electorate was against electoral reform so an election on the existing boundaries could take place at the normal time. A Machiavellian sceptic might surmise that such tactics could take

electoral reform out of the equation and deflate Labor's case. Goss responded by stating that 'the Labor Party wants electoral reform but it doesn't trust this government or its package' of proposals (*QPD* 1989:vol. 313, p. 89). He also claimed that the government could undertake a five-month redistribution if it so chose, as it had done in a hurry in 1977 (but presumably that is without a prior independent review of the system as a whole). Ahern responded with equal gusto, saying 'members opposite are hypocritical in the extreme in voting against a real, guaranteed, ironclad possibility of independent electoral assessment and reform in this State'. He accused Goss of merely seeking to smear his reputation and confuse the electorate so they would vote 'no' in the referendum. Tellingly, he insisted that while Goss was opposing the opportunity for electoral reform in the House, his state secretary, Wayne Swan, was running around with a petition asking for an electoral redistribution before the next election. When Goss claimed that was not true, Ahern produced the petition and began reading from its contents.

Ahern had also introduced as part of these electoral proposals a separate draft bill to establish the Electoral and Administrative Review Commission (EARC) as recommended by Fitzgerald. The bill, based on draft legislation included in the *Fitzgerald Report*, proposed a continuing independent commission, headed by a commissioner. When introducing the bill, Ahern announced he was guillotining the legislation, allowing only three days (rather than seven sitting days) for the Parliament's deliberations before gagging debate, and presumably passing the bill. Labor was predictably disappointed with the intended legislation, not because it opposed such a body or the need for review, but because the bill mentioned only analysis of the zonal system and did not include any mention of examining the principle of one vote, one value.

The maelstrom of conservative party-room politics intervened, however, before all these electorally related bills could finally be passed and, while the extension of the parliamentary legislation and the referendum proposal passed their three readings, the EARC bill did not. Dissidents in the ministry and on the Nationals' backbench were nervous about the direction in which Ahern was taking them. His Premiership was in terminal decline and over the coming days he had many other pressing things to occupy his mind.

## **Premier Russell Cooper: a last, desperate hurl of the dice**

After the release of the *Fitzgerald Report* in July 1989, it appeared to many Nationals in both the parliamentary and organisational wings that Mike Ahern could no longer 'contain the damage' and a new leader ought to be found. There

was not much choice. Arguably, the sole shining light emerging from the first two Ahern ministries was Russell Cooper—an increasingly forceful cabinet minister who had developed a strongman image in government and in public perceptions. In the Corrective Services portfolio, he had embraced a major reform program, overcame intractable problems in the sector and established a new business-like statutory framework for managing prisons (including competitive bidding to operate them). As Police Minister, he had shown an appreciation of the need for thorough reform to root out poor practice. If anyone could claim some glory for real achievements it was him. He was more conservative than Ahern (who was increasingly seen by his colleagues as ‘too moderate’) and embraced a homophobic, Bible-based morality. His more traditional ‘Country Party’ image seemed to appeal to voters in the bush—and, as a consequence, resonated with the party’s president, Sir Robert Sparkes (and to some extent with Bjelke-Petersen, who was still undermining Ahern from the hustings). Cooper was a little uncertain when faced with complex agendas, famously flunked a journalist’s curly question about the separation of powers and was uncharitably referred to as a ‘Joh clone’ by the Labor Party and sections of the Brisbane media and as a ‘closet Bjelke-Petersen’ by Goss. Cooper himself partly fanned this image when he kept talking about ‘this accountability thing’ that had to be attended to as though it were some foreign being, and used the odd Joh-like expression, repetitively, such as ‘there’s no question about it’. He would later say that when he became Premier he was on a ‘hiding to nothing’ (*Four Corners*, ABC TV, March 2008).

The machinations to remove Ahern in mid–late 1989 were not straightforward and the Cooper forces took two goes to unseat the Premier. Initially one of Ahern’s backers, Cooper began to have doubts about whether under Ahern’s leadership they would be able to retain government at the forthcoming election. He successfully combined two diametrically opposed groups of dissidents: those former Ahern supporters who now shared Cooper’s reservations about Ahern’s ability to win; and those ‘Joh loyalists’ who had never fully welcomed Ahern’s takeover. The first attempt to depose Ahern failed. On 27 August, three conspiring ministers (Cooper, Paul Clauson and Bob Katter) resigned from cabinet, initiating a spill the next day. Attempting to tough it out, Ahern narrowly won the party-room vote by 26–21—in effect, by three votes (although Cooper’s side had been claiming they had 28 votes locked in; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 August 1989). In the lead-up to this ballot, Sparkes remained loyal to the Premier. The resignation of the three ministers necessitated a minor reshuffle in Ahern’s third but short-lived ministry. Three relative lightweights were promoted: Tony FitzGerald, who had been taking on a far more active role in parliamentary debates, was made Justice Minister, replacing Clauson;

Huan Fraser was appointed to the Industry portfolio; and Tom Gilmore received Community Services, Ethnic Affairs and Northern Development (replacing Katter).

Not to be dismayed, the plotters orchestrated a second tilt. With the daylight saving trial, announced in September 1989, becoming the catalyst for much internal dissatisfaction, Cooper called another party-room spill for 25 September and won the leadership ballot this time with the full support of Sparkes. The political calculation among the party stalwarts appeared to have changed to one of minimising losses at the forthcoming poll. Ahern was expendable so was beheaded. Ironically, opinion polls subsequently suggested that popular support was gradually returning to the embattled Ahern in the months out from the election—and that Cooper could have dashed this return of conservative support in the clumsy takeover. Cooper's desperate actions merely underscored the impression that the Nationals were not fit to govern.

Ahern quit the Premiership with a philosophical, if stoic, acquiescence and returned to the backbench, where he was gently taunted by the Labor members. Once Ahern was removed, Goss claimed in the Assembly that Ahern was deposed because he had been intending to introduce reforms—something he had not said when Ahern was in office. Ahern did not resign from the Parliament and, indeed, recontested his seat at the 1989 election, which he duly won, before resigning and causing a further by-election for Landsborough in 1990.

On 25 September, Russell Cooper was appointed as the new Premier of Queensland. Cooper's term of just two and a half months was to be among the shortest in the history of Queensland. To provide a degree of stability, Bill Gunn, the man largely credited with starting the reform process by initiating the Fitzgerald Inquiry more than two years earlier, remained as the Deputy Premier. He had occupied this role under three premiers in as many years. Cooper's ministry was a strange amalgam of old hands, surviving Ahern ministers and incorporated dissidents. Ahern and Brian Austin refused to serve in the new ministry. Cooper dropped Bill Glasson, Peter McKechnie, Martin Tenni, Geoff Muntz and Craig Sherrin and did not reappoint the short-termed Tom Gilmore. Paul Clauson and Yvonne Chapman were reinstated. Ahern's last-minute appointments, Tony FitzGerald and Huan Fraser, were retained. Finally, Mark Stoneman, Gil Alison, Ian Henderson and Beryce Nelson all became ministers for the first time. Under Cooper, the portfolios were entirely rejigged, with Vince Lester and Bob Katter receiving the biggest promotions. Lester's new responsibilities seemed to go to his head straight away as he thought the police were there as a personalised taxi service to take him on errands—something the media was quick to pounce on. Cooper's full ministry was sworn in on 25 September 1989.

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- Premier, Treasurer and Minister for State Development: Russell Cooper
- Deputy Premier and Minister for Finance and Minister for Local Government: Bill Gunn
- Minister for Health: Ivan Gibbs
- Minister for Police, Employment, Training and Industrial Affairs: Vince Lester
- Minister for Land Management: Nev Harper
- Minister for Mines and Energy, Northern and Regional Development: Bob Katter
- Minister for Water Resources and Maritime Services: Don Neal
- Minister for Attorney-General, Heritage and Arts: Paul Clauson
- Minister for Tourism, Environment, Conservation and Forestry: Rob Borbidge
- Minister for Works and Housing: Jim Randell
- Minister for Education, Youth, Sport and Recreation: Brian Littleproud
- Minister for Community Services, Emergency and Administrative Services: Tony FitzGerald
- Minister for Industry, Small Business and Technology: Huan Fraser
- Minister for Transport and Ethnic Affairs: Yvonne Chapman
- Minister for Primary Industries: Mark Stoneman
- Minister for Main Roads and Racing: Gil Alison
- Minister for Justice and Corrective Services: Ian Henderson
- Minister for Family Services: Beryce Nelson

The Parliament met the next day, on 26 September, to allow some revised Fitzgerald legislation to be passed in the session and to ensure ‘clear, full and proper debate’ (*QPD* 1989:vol. 313, p. 1161). It sat for a total of just nine days throughout the months of September and October, before being dissolved by proclamation on 19 October 1989. On the first morning back, Premier Cooper flagged that his leadership heralded a renewed emphasis to ‘ensure a State in which law and order prevails’. He declared: ‘these are extraordinary times that require clear thinking and a fresh approach’ to governing, although there was not much time to change anything substantial. He informed the House that the reforms begun under Ahern would continue, but announced a new initiative called the ‘Premier’s Independent Commission for Change and Reform’ (PICCAR, often parodied as ‘piker’ by his opponents). This commission, which was chaired by Jim Kennedy, was envisaged to last for one year initially, until the Fitzgerald arrangements were up and running. PICCAR’s chief role was to ‘supervise and be responsible for the implementation of the Fitzgerald recommendations, including the establishment of the Electoral and Administrative Review Commission (EARC) and the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC)’. Cooper

assured the Parliament that the commission would guarantee 'the complete independence of these bodies'. PICCAR was also empowered to report and recommend to the Premier any area of Queensland administration that Kennedy believed needed further review or reform (*QPD* 1989:vol. 313, p. 611). Many saw the PICCAR initiative—although too short to have much effect—as an attempt to ride shotgun over the whole process.

After these announcements, and to derail any possible opposition attack before it had begun, Cooper immediately moved a motion of confidence in his government. In his defence, Cooper referred to the problems Labor governments were experiencing in other states, while Gunn spoke of his pleasure in supporting the new Premier (to taunts from Labor that he was 'now known as King Rat'). Goss suggested that, unlike the earlier motion of confidence moved by Ahern in his government, this later move was a 'pathetic precedent'. He claimed that the 'disappointing spectacle' of a Premier having to move 'confidence in himself when everybody knows that his party is racked by division' did not inspire much confidence (*QPD* 1989:vol. 313, p. 618). Significantly, Goss gave one of his best speeches in the Parliament in this debate, receiving a standing ovation from the public gallery, causing the Speaker to warn he would clear the gallery if it did not stop applauding. Arguing the state needed a strong future with good government, he said:

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

Now that Cooper was the main 'enemy', Labor members could afford to display some belated sympathy for the former Premier—reminiscent perhaps of the opposition's comments made after the ousting of Bjelke-Petersen. Burns, however, gave a few characteristic twists of the knife in his assessment of Ahern:

Since yesterday Queensland has had its second unelected Premier in as many years. Mr Cooper, like Mr Ahern, has never received a mandate from the voters of Queensland. The only mandate that he has been given has come from National Party headquarters and Sir Robert Sparkes. Mr Ahern was no leader. He could not make decisions. The only time he

rallied his party behind him was last Friday, and they stabbed him in the back. I understand why he has moved up to the back of the Chamber. I would not let them get behind me again either. However, Mr Ahern was working towards ending corruption. That is why the National Party could not let him survive. (*QPD* 1989:vol. 313, pp. 628–9)

With the Liberals choosing to support the motion of confidence in the Cooper administration, the motion was carried by a margin of 57 to 29, with only Labor members voting against.

Goss was scathing about the new Cooper ministry. He reminded the Parliament that since the Nationals had formed government alone in 1983 there had been seven different ministries (and other tinkering changes) and 36 different National Party members had been made ministers during that period; it seemed, he said, as if ‘every player gets a prize’. Such turnover caused Goss to joke that ‘the remaining six [National backbenchers] should not despair...because at the rate the National Party is going, all its parliamentary members will get a turn by the time this year is out’ (*QPD* 1989:vol. 313, p. 650). In contrast, he reasoned, his shadow ministry was ‘stable, united and confident’, although the Liberal leader, Angus Innes, said the opposition was full of ‘retreads’ because ‘behind Mr Goss and behind the veneer, there is the same tired, recycled, old failed performers who have to be disguised’ (*QPD* 1989:vol. 313, p. 637). And so it went, with the predictable argy-bargy that often occurred in the House as election time drew closer.

Under Cooper’s interregnum, the House debated 25 pieces of legislation in nine sitting days. Fourteen of these bills were initiated during Cooper’s term in office (although several bills had previously been withdrawn and were being reintroduced). Most importantly, the government introduced and passed the Fitzgerald-inspired Electoral and Administrative Review Bill to bring about an Electoral and Administrative Review Commission and a Parliamentary Electoral and Administrative Review Committee; and the Criminal Justice Bill to provide for the establishment of the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) and its corresponding parliamentary committee (*QPD* 1989:vol. 313, pp. 1377–81). Other important pieces of legislation were constitutional in nature. Labor’s Dean Wells sarcastically referred to the Constitution (Cancellation of Referendum) Bill as ‘historic’ because it was the only time in history he could remember that a government ‘has ever been so incompetent as to call a referendum and then subsequently cancel it’ (*QPD* 1989:vol. 313, p. 733). In contrast, Labor’s Ken McElligott welcomed the Constitution Act Amendment Bill because it proposed formal recognition of local government.

Other bills introduced during this final session of the Parliament concerned items of interest to the government’s core constituencies such as mining or

primary industries, including: the Wheat Marketing Facilitations Bill, the Sugar Milling Rationalisations (Far Northern Region Act) Amendment Bill and the Cotton Industry Deregulation Bill. Some of these bills were contentious, as with the Central Queensland Coal Associates Agreement Amendment Bill, which led the Liberal leader Innes to make the political point that Labor's 'grandstanding' over its opposition to this bill was futile and that 'if the Government had been defeated in the House, the election date would not have been advanced one single day' (*QPD* 1989:vol. 313, p. 726).

There was inevitably some final tidying up to do—over minor electoral amendments, two new universities (Central Queensland and Southern Queensland), university amalgamations around Brisbane (the University of Queensland and the Agricultural College at Gatton, and Griffith University with the Brisbane College of Advanced Education) and amendments to statute laws. Dean Wells mockingly congratulated the new Justice Minister, Ian Henderson, for introducing the Elections Act Amendment Bill, saying because of the time of night '[t]is now the very witching time of night, when churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out Contagion to this world'. He predicted that it would be only the first and last bill Henderson introduced (even though Tony FitzGerald and not Henderson introduced the bill and Henderson merely opened the second reading debate). Wells noted that it seemed like only yesterday that he was making 'congratulatory remarks to the honourable member for Lockyer [FitzGerald] on his first Bill as Minister for Justice [the *Elections Act* amendments, adding] It was his last Bill as Minister for Justice' (*QPD* 1989:vol. 313, p. 998).

When Mark Stoneman presented his Stock Act and Local Government Act Amendment Bill on 28 September, he began by making a speech to the wrong act. After he had cited the supposed purpose of the bill, Ed Casey jumped to his feet to correct him! Casey said, 'I believe the Minister is reading the wrong speech. He should be reading a speech on the amendment of the Stock Act and the Local Government Act', whereupon Stoneman said plaintively, 'My apologies, Mr Speaker. I thank you Mr Casey' (*QPD* 1989:vol. 313, p. 967). Attention to detail and to matters at hand seemed to be honoured only in the breach.

In the final days of the forty-fifth Parliament, Russell Cooper announced a timetable for the implementation of some of the Fitzgerald reforms and stated that Noel Newnham had been appointed as the new Interim Police Commissioner (to which Wayne Goss complained that he had not been consulted on the appointment). Goss also asked the Premier whether it was true that four current or former cabinet ministers were about to be charged over the misuse of their ministerial expenses and cash advances, and fished around to find names, asking whether Vince Lester was one of those 'potentially being investigated' (*QPD* 1989:vol. 313, pp. 1160, 1273, 1280). Lester could have been investigated (as

were other ministers) but was not charged.<sup>7</sup> At the time, Terry Mackenroth asked whether notices of intention to prosecute had been issued to these ministers and whether Ian Callinan QC had briefed cabinet on how to respond to Doug Drummond's queries about ministers' use of their expense accounts. In various replies, Cooper insisted that he was aware of rumours about ministers being charged, that the ministers were presumed innocent until proven otherwise and that Callinan had not briefed cabinet, but added 'if the people who have been sent letters requiring some form of explanation have sought legal advice, I say good luck to them' (*QPD* 1989:vol. 313, p. 1437).

The Opposition Leader managed one last salvo against the government in a matter-of-public-interest debate on 17 October 1989. Goss zeroed in on the recent performance of the government, stating:

The future of this State hangs in the balance. Today I propose to sum up the past and also point to the future under the next Labor Government. Mr Speaker, in what is to be the last week of this Parliament I am reminded that you and I and many others were first elected to this place six years ago this month. I am reminded of—and I want to quote from—my first speech in this place, which I think summed up the legacy at that time of 26 years of National–Liberal Government and still today accurately sums up the legacy of 32 years of conservative Government. I said—'Queensland is a State of great wealth, rich in both natural resources and talent, yet impoverished in its system of government and the way in which it provides for its people. With each passing year, powerful interests accrue more power, and patronage and favouritism increase—at the expense of the living standards and freedoms of average Queenslanders... We have not seen "government of the people, for the people, by the people"; we have seen government for the benefit of Sir Robert Sparkes, Sir Edward Lyons, Sir William Allen, Sir Charles Holm and "Sir" Fred Maybury, who is six weeks too late [because imperial honours had just been removed]. They are the persons who have derived the benefits from the administration of this State'...

In six weeks' time, the wheel of history will turn a full circle as Queenslanders see and realise, as the polls are reflecting, that they have the capacity to change this State for the better... The people of this State can see the wide and dark shadow full of guilty secrets that has been hidden behind the closed doors of Executive Government and behind

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<sup>7</sup> Later, five ministers did face charges and trial: Don Lane, Brian Austin, Leisha Harvey, Geoff Muntz and Ivan Gibbs. The first four were each found guilty and jailed while Gibbs was found not guilty at his trial and released.

the doors of the bunker in which the deals are done and the strings are pulled...The National Party–Liberal Party legacy is a betrayal of trust. (QPD 1989:vol. 313, p. 1441)

The speech was not rebuffed by any great oratory. Later, Lyle Schuntner (Lib., Mount Coot-tha) said Goss's speech had displayed considerable 'bitterness, vindictiveness and hatred' and added 'those are not the bases on which the future of Queensland will improve' (QPD 1989:vol. 313, p. 1494).

On the final day, a revised Criminal Justice Bill was introduced incorporating further suggestions from public submissions and was read three times and passed in the day's sitting. In the last hours, Cooper's valedictory address noted that Ted Row, Bill Glasson, Peter McKechnie, Martin Tenni and Gordon Simpson from the Nationals' side were retiring from the Parliament; that Brian Davis, Les Yewdale, Bob Scott and Eric Shaw were not standing again for Labor; and that Bill Lickiss and Norm Lee from the Liberals were retiring as well at the election. He concluded that 'this has been a most productive Parliament. I look forward to the next Parliament with anticipation and relish' (QPD 1989:vol. 313, p. 1802).

## **The 1989 election campaign: floods of gays, clean out the rats...**

After the failed bid to delay the state election, via a proposed referendum, Premier Russell Cooper nominated 2 December as the date of the election; it was with some apparent reluctance that he called the election after such a short time at the helm (*Gold Coast Bulletin*, 24 October 1989, p. 1). The eventual date he chose was no accident. Seventeen years earlier to the day, Gough Whitlam's Labor Party had come to power in Canberra. Whitlam's unpopularity in Queensland helped boost Bjelke-Petersen's image as a tough and decisive premier in the mid-1970s and Cooper hoped the symbolism of 2 December would portend success for the Nationals and remind Queenslanders that voting for a Labor government would jeopardise the state's economy. The difficulty for Cooper, however, was that this was the first election since 1969 to be held without Bjelke-Petersen leading the campaign. Cooper was far less savvy and knew from the start it was going to be a tough fight (*Courier-Mail*, 25 November 1989; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 October 1989).

From the beginning of the campaign, his approach seemed to be to press ahead and ignore the almost daily media circus that continued to unearth new allegations as those connected with the Bjelke-Petersen regime fell in the wake of Fitzgerald's report. Criminal charges, continuing trials and a string of guilty verdicts kept the sensational coverage going. His key message was to say

repeatedly that ‘corruption was not a poll issue’. Travelling the state, Cooper asserted that the corruption issues that had dominated the media for the past couple of years were overstated distractions. He told supporters in Hughenden, for example, that ‘we have been plagued by the Fitzgerald Inquiry...but we started it and we will finish it’ (*Northern Miner*, 17 October 1989). He preferred to direct attention towards moral issues such as abortion and homosexuality, to galvanise the religious right. Indeed, some right-wing religious groups also lent support to the Nationals’ campaign, with the Toowoomba-based Logos Foundation leading the charge by urging voters to remember that corruption was one of the ‘secondary issues’ and ‘that the primary factor in a society is its moral values’ (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 October 1989). To get this message across, the Nationals ran advertisements suggesting that should Labor be elected to government, its stated policy of decriminalising homosexuality would see a ‘flood of gays crossing the border from the Southern States’. Cooper also tried to copy Bjelke-Petersen’s tough stance on crime, suggesting at one point that Queensland should ‘bring back the noose’ and reintroduce capital punishment, much to the disgust of the moderates in his own cabinet, although this idea was supported by the Attorney-General, Ian Henderson, who wanted to hold a referendum on the issue (*Sun*, 30 October 1989). In return, Labor reiterated its criticism of Cooper that he was nothing more than a ‘clone of Joh’ seeking to wind the clock back.

Playing to what it considered one of its strengths, the government directed attention towards its economic record. The Nationals’ campaign theme of ‘Queensland, Be Proud’ reminded voters of Queensland’s unprecedented economic growth under the Nationals. Its media advertisements sought to magnify a nagging fear in the heart of some swinging voters that Labor would not have the discipline to effectively manage the economy. One National advertisement asked: ‘Can Queensland afford three years of hard Labor?’ (*Australian Financial Review*, 30 October 1989). The government itself, however, had few new announcements to make on the economic front. As a measure of some desperation, Deputy Premier Gunn was moved to promise that poker machines would be allowed into Queensland clubs if the government were returned as a stimulus to tourism—an opportunistic U-turn in policy (*The Canberra Times*, 26 October 1989).

The Liberal Party had virtually conceded it could not get back into government unless it was part of a coalition arrangement (*QPD* 1989:vol. 313, p. 1442). Making it difficult for the Liberals, however, its leader, Angus Innes, made it clear that his party would not join with the Nationals in a coalition unless it was the senior partner (*Gold Coast Bulletin*, 12 October 1989). This implied that the party that won just 10 seats in 1986 would need to see a massive surge in its voter support to get it above the Nationals (perhaps securing as many as 30

seats—an enormously daunting task and a rash statement indeed!). In the final week of the campaign, Innes's rash statement was blamed for a crash in Liberal support—down from 26 per cent to 18 per cent just before the poll (*Australian Financial Review*, 27 November 1989).

Needing an overall swing of 5.5 per cent to oust the conservatives, Goss stressed that 1989 was a choice between a Goss Labor government and stability or 'a divided coalition, a constitutional crisis and another election in three months' (*Gold Coast Bulletin*, 24 October 1989:2). Labor's campaign slogan was 'Wayne Goss and Labor—the only change for the better'. He pleaded with the electorate to give him a one-term chance and if Labor did not perform to kick it out at the next election. He attacked the record of the Nationals' government, saying the 1989 poll was about a 'fresh start', adding Queenslanders had to 'clean out the rats, clean out the cupboards and start again' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 October 1989). Against the scare tactics used by Premier Cooper, Goss promised to not increase taxes, to deliver honest government and to restore integrity to public life. Goss committed Labor to introduce the raft of accountability arrangements advocated by Fitzgerald, including electoral reform and widespread public sector reform. He gave commitments to regional economic development, to establish a state bank and promised educational reform, housing assistance and to stop the proposed Wolffdene Dam. Later, he would famously tell his supporters to 'take a cold shower' at the victory celebrations held in the tally room and that he would manage his government so as not to 'frighten the horses', which became a virtual mantra.

In the context of the Fitzgerald fallout, however, and with the recent leadership instability, Cooper had difficulty convincing voters the Nationals deserved to be returned. Opinion polls showed the Nationals were unpopular with the electorate while the ALP's support rose from an initial 42 per cent to a final 48 per cent in a poll conducted by Newspoll a day or so before the election (*The Australian*, 2 December 1989). The government's standing was not helped by the release of Queen's Council Doug Drummond's report on misuse of ministerial expenses during the campaign. While Cooper was again insistent that the 'presumption of innocence' should apply to his ministerial team and to former ministers, the incident seemed to remind the community of the 'snouts in the trough' mentality that prevailed in the government.

In total, 334 candidates stood for election in 1989—the most candidates ever to stand. Labor again contested every seat, standing a number of 'hopeful' candidates in seats it did not believe it could win; the Nationals managed to contest 85 seats, while the Liberals ran 77 candidates in 76 seats—the most it had ever attempted. Interestingly, the Australian Democrats managed to field just seven candidates (less than half the number they had stood in 1986), while the Greens, who were rumoured to be considering standing candidates, did not

field any candidates in 1989 (and, indeed, did not do so until 1995). Heralding in a generational change, the conservatives selected two of the youngest candidates ever to stand at a state election. Lawrence Springborg, described in the media as a ‘21 year old farm labourer’, ran in the prized seat of Carnarvon (vacated by Peter McKechnie) for the National Party, while the Liberals’ preselected eighteen-year-old Peter Dutton to run against ALP stalwart Tom Burns in Lytton (see *Sun*, 30 October 1989). Although Springborg, who would come to lead the Nationals in 2003, was successful in his election to the Parliament, Dutton not surprisingly failed in his first bid for a seat, but was to win the federal seat of Dickson for the Liberal Party in 2001.

The 1989 poll was the third election in a row that was most fiercely contested and in which a high degree of volatility was predicted. Although the result might have appeared inevitable in retrospect, in the lead-up to the election, the result was very much in doubt and Goss warned Labor supporters not to take victory for granted. Labor still had to contend with the zonal malapportionment that inflated the seats of the Nationals. The conservatives had retained the three by-elections in the lead-up to the state-wide poll and Labor’s vote had remained frozen and had sometimes fallen backwards. National Party strategists indicated that the seats they considered winnable were the Liberal-held seats of Mount Isa, Ashgrove and Yeronga (where Norm Lee was retiring), while the ALP-held seats of Thuringowa, Mourilyan and Cook were under serious challenge. The Liberal Party, stressing it was the sole ‘private enterprise’ party, believed it would do well given the cronyism and odium of corruption hanging over the Nationals. The party hinted that more than 40 of the 89 seats could change hands—and it was hopeful of capturing seats on the Darling Downs as well as the Sunshine and Gold Coasts. It indicated it was targeting five National-held seats—those of: Isis, Maryborough, Barambah (now National, as Trevor Perrett had rejoined the Nationals in December 1988), Townsville and even Whitsunday.

Labor’s campaign director, Wayne Swan, made a direct appeal to peel off conservative voters. He argued that there were a lot of ‘die-hard National Party voters who were saying “we’ll vote for Labor just this once—we’ll give them a chance”’. He told the media that the party would not lose any seats and had targeted 20 seats to win—namely: Barron River, Mulgrave, Tablelands, Mount Isa, Flinders, Whitsunday, Broadsound, Maryborough, Isis, Glasshouse, Pine Rivers, Stafford, Ashgrove, Nundah, Yeronga, Redlands, Springwood, Toowoomba North, Currumbin and Warrego (*Sun*, 30 October 1989). Significantly, Labor captured 16 of the 20 seats Swan had targeted (failing to capture only Currumbin, Flinders, Tablelands and Warrego).

Shortly after the polls closed on 2 December 1989, there was no doubt who had won. Even as early as 8 pm it was clear Labor had achieved a substantial swing, increasing its vote by about 9 per cent. It had been elected as the new

government of Queensland. For the first time since 1957, Labor received more than 50 per cent of the primary vote, eventually winning 54 seats in the new Parliament (an increase of 24 seats over the number it had won at the 1986 election). The Liberal Party also gained a swing towards it of 4.5 per cent, taking its vote to 21.05 per cent. This level of support, however, translated into just eight seats in the House—two less than it won in 1986. The main losers were the Nationals, who lost 22 seats in total, returning to the Parliament with 27 seats won on 24.09 per cent of the vote.

A total of 50 sitting members were returned and two former members were re-elected to the House (Labor's Jim Fouras representing Ashgrove, and eventually in 1990 after a case of disputed returns, the Nationals' Neil Turner in Nicklin). No fewer than 28 new Labor members entered the Assembly in what was its largest injection of Labor talent in decades. These new members included (alphabetically): Ray Barber (Cooroora), Peter Beattie (Brisbane Central), Lorraine Bird (Whitsunday), Steve Bredhauer (Cook), Darryl Briskey (Redlands), Dr Lesley Clark (Barron River), Ken Davies (Townsville), Bob Dollin (Maryborough), Wendy Edmond (Mount Coot-tha), Jim Elder (Manly), Gary Fenlon (Greenslopes), Dr John Flynn (Toowoomba North), Matt Foley (Yeronga), Phil Heath (Nundah), Ray Hollis (Redcliffe), Don Livingstone (Ipswich West), Tony McGrady (Mount Isa), Bill Nunn (Isis), Jim Pearce (Broadsound), Warren Pitt (Mulgrave), Laurel Power (Mansfield), Molly Robson (Springwood), Robert Schwarten (Rockhampton North), Judy Spence (Mount Gravatt), Jon Sullivan (Glasshouse), John Szczerbanik (Albert), Rod Welford (Stafford) and Margaret Woodgate (Pine Rivers). Thirteen of this group would become ministers in future Labor governments; a further two parliamentary secretaries; two would become Speakers of the Assembly; and one, Peter Beattie, a subsequent Premier.

The Liberals picked up five (then four) additional seats: Ray Connor (Nerang), Trevor Coomber (Currumbin), John Goss (Apsley), Bob King (Nicklin, but which was overturned in court in November 1990 in favour of the Nationals' Neil Turner) and Bob Quinn (South Coast). Dr David Watson retained the seat of Moggill for the Liberals (replacing the retiring Bill Lickiss). Quinn and Watson would become ministers in a future Coalition government and at different times party leaders and Connor would also make the ministry. Three new National Party members were elected to safe seats—Vaughan Johnson (Gregory), Marc Rowell (Hinchinbrook) and Lawrence Springborg (Carnarvon)—and all would become ministers in the Borbidge government.

Claiming victory, Wayne Goss became the State's thirty-fourth Premier, on 7 December 1989, shepherding Labor back into government after 32 years in the wilderness. Although he toyed with creating a smaller ministry (for better central coordination), he decided to retain the 18 positions but reconfigure the portfolios.

His initial ministry was, like Frank Nicklin's in 1957, totally inexperienced in government but with many years' experience in the toils of opposition. It included

- Premier, Minister for Economic and Trade Development and for the Arts: Wayne Goss
- Deputy Premier and Minister for Housing and Local Government: Tom Burns
- Minister for Police and Emergency Services: Terry Mackenroth
- Treasurer and Minister for Regional Development: Keith De Lacy
- Minister for Tourism, Sport and Racing: Bob Gibbs
- Minister for Transport and Minister Assisting the Premier on Economic and Trade Development: David Hamill
- Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations: Nev Warburton
- Minister for Resource Industries: Ken Vaughan
- Minister for Primary Industries: Ed Casey
- Minister for Health: Ken McElligott
- Minister for Education: Paul Braddy
- Minister for Environment and Heritage: Pat Comben
- Attorney-General: Dean Wells
- Minister for Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs: Anne Warner
- Minister for Justice and Corrective Services: Glen Milliner
- Minister for Administrative Services: Ron McLean
- Minister for Manufacturing and Commerce: Geoff Smith
- Minister for Land Management: Bill Eaton

The Labor government had its own agenda and policy priorities, but it also had to wrestle immediately with the Fitzgerald reform agenda. Queensland was about to embark on a whole new chapter in its political history.