"In Queensland there are relatively few formal restraints upon the exercise of power by the government of the day."
Commissioner Tony Fitzgerald

Peter Coaldrake
WORKING THE SYSTEM

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WORKING THE SYSTEM
GOVERNMENT IN QUEENSLAND

Peter Coaldrake
This book is for Lee, Emma, and Jessica; it is also for my parents.
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Introduction

Most of what has been written about Queensland politics over recent years has focused on the political style and policies of Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen and his personal dominance of the Queensland political stage. One of the effects of this consuming interest of observers in the person rather than the party has been to deflect attention from the way the Nationals built and broadened their power base, eclipsed the Liberals in government and kept the Labor party in the political wilderness. Even less has been known about how the Nationals in government have operated, although there have been some inklings as a result of the Fitzgerald Inquiry.

This book is about how politics and government have been played, and continue to be played, in Queensland. In particular, it is about how the Nationals have operated as a government and how they have used political power.

The Queensland National party staunchly professes its affection for the British monarchy, its commitment to democratic ideals, its attachment to the so-called Westminster system, and its determination forever to preserve and defend these traditions. Rhetoric aside, however, the Nationals over the years have shown they neither appreciated nor were concerned about the role of the various institutions in a parliamentary system of accountable government, the interrelationships among them, or the principle of the separation of powers.

As a consequence, the distinctions between “party” and “government” have become badly blurred, if not lost, as have those between “parliament” and “government”. The entire institutional fabric of Queensland has been manipulated — in
fact, utterly politicised — in the process of broadening the support of the National party and maintaining it in power.

The blame for the situation in Queensland cannot be levelled entirely at the Nationals; over the years the other parties have contributed to it, as have the media.

The ruling National party, post-Bjelke-Petersen and post-Fitzgerald, has promised a more accountable government. The new style is unfamiliar and somewhat threatening to many in the party. It also remains to be seen whether very much has really changed. The National party organisation maintains as close a watch as ever over the parliamentary party in general, and the cabinet in particular. There is also no indication whatsoever that the post-Bjelke-Petersen National party will modify the most crucial element of its political foundation in Queensland, the zonal electoral system. Above all, it is the zonal system which has provided the Nationals with a longstanding buffer against political defeat and encouraged a view within the electorate of the party’s electoral invulnerability.
With the disintegration of the twenty-six year coalition in August 1983, and the routing of the state Liberals at the subsequent general election, Joh Bjelke-Petersen and the Queensland Nationals realised their long-held political fantasy: the opportunity to govern Queensland in their own right. The achievement was a remarkable one. In just ten years the Nationals had managed to overcome the potentially fatal handicap of a dwindling electoral base and an image increasingly at odds with the state’s changing economic and demographic profile. They discarded their traditional "Country party" label in favour of a new name and, with the considerable support of the party’s organisational wing, set about the process of addressing their attentions to a much wider set of issues, particularly matters of concern to urban voters in the southeast of the state. The Nationals made gains in the coastal and hinterland areas outside Brisbane and, from 1977, it became apparent that their particular brand of strident anti-Labor politics was also loosening the grip of the Liberal party as the "natural" conservative party of the metropolitan and urban areas.

Not surprisingly, the Liberals became increasingly anxious about the situation. The first sign was at their 1976 state convention, where the different perspectives of the parliamentary and organisational wings regarding the political direction and role of the Liberal party in Queensland became evident. Tensions increased as the Liberals witnessed a drift in their electoral support from 31.1 per cent at the 1974 state election to 26.9 per cent at the 1980 poll, and then deteriorate to an estimated 17 or 18 per cent in opinion poll support by the time the coalition self-destructed in August 1983. Over the same period support for their partners, the
Nationals, had risen to an almost corresponding extent, from 27.9 per cent at the 1974 state poll to an estimated 34 per cent in the August 1983 Morgan survey and 38.9 per cent at the October 1983 general election.

This deterioration in Liberal support only aggravated the party's fundamental dilemma about its bridesmaid status in Queensland politics. On the one hand, the Liberals' role in the state's governing coalition had given the party legitimacy and standing and, significantly for the senior members of the parliamentary party, the considerable spoils of office. On the other, there had developed in the public mind a clear impression that the Nationals were far more adroit tactically than their coalition partners. The Liberal party organisation was thus increasingly frustrated by what it perceived as the inability or unwillingness of its parliamentarians to influence the framing of government policy and thereby to secure identifiably "Liberal" measures, such as electoral or parliamentary reform. Joh Bjelke-Petersen's unwavering opposition to such reformist causes, which he periodically ridiculed as "hoo-ha" or "trendy", did not make the Liberals' task any easier; nor did the party's inability to develop an organisational or electoral base beyond the south-eastern corner of the state, an inability at least partly enforced by the coalition arrangement under which each partner was discouraged from contesting the other's seats.

While the Nationals' trouncing of the Liberals in 1983 was comprehensive, a feeling still lingered in Liberal ranks that the Nationals' ascendency would be temporary and that traditional Liberals would return to the fold once they had sampled the style of a National party government now unfettered from the strictures of coalition. True, the Nationals' position was fragile to the extent that prior to the 1983 state poll they had only ever held one Brisbane seat, Wynnum, for a single term between 1974 and 1977. At the same time, the 1983 result provided them with a hitherto elusive metropolitan base, netting the party five seats on election night, and a further two following the post-election defections of two former Liberal ministers, Don Lane and Brian Austin. Even more impressive for the Nationals in 1983 was that, in contesting many Brisbane seats for the first time, they outpolled the Liberals in 15 of the 18 metropolitan seats which both parties contested.
Indeed, if the Nationals made a tactical error in their metropolitan campaign at that election it was their decision not to contest every Brisbane seat. Had they done so, the rout of the Liberals might have been complete.

Throughout his premiership Bjelke-Petersen and his government sought to be perceived as forcefully promoting Queensland’s economic development and its status as the last bastion of free enterprise, at the same time staunchly protecting and defending the state’s moral and political values. He also refined to a new level of frenzy the hostility toward the Commonwealth government which, long before his premiership, had developed as an important element of Queensland’s political culture. Sir Joh’s assaults on the Labor party were as savage as they were relentless, while his careful cultivation of the equation that anything Labor was un-Queensland, anti-Queensland, socialist, Canberra-based and, therefore, wrong, proved an extremely effective weapon in his oratorical arsenal against his traditional foes.

Immediately the coalition arrangement was terminated the Nationals moved to destabilise and delegitimise the state’s Liberals in precisely the same manner as the previous coalition government had done over the years with the ALP. Instead of proceeding directly to the polls after the coalition break-up the premier recommended to the governor, and was permitted to form, a temporary minority government to administer the affairs of the state for the sixty-day period leading up to the announced election date. This proved a shrewd ploy, allowing the premier valuable weeks in which to demonstrate his claim that the departure of the Liberals had simply forced some rearrangements and that government business was "as usual". In other words, the formation of the temporary minority government - including the appointment of a number of additional National party ministers to cover the portfolios vacated by the Liberals - allowed the National party valuable time to legitimise itself as a government and to convince the electorate that the Liberals had deserted their responsibilities and thus were now no more than political counterfeit.

The Nationals’ minority government status also conferred upon the party the considerable advantage of conducting the election campaign as the government, that is, from the political high-
ground. That advantage was probably enhanced by the decision to launch their official election campaign before either the ALP or the Liberals. By leading off the campaign the Nationals were able to establish the issues on which the election would be fought. It also enabled the premier, now treasurer as well, to incorporate within the National party policy statement - and thus take credit for - a range of initiatives which were compiled by the previous Liberal treasurer and which in other circumstances would have been contained in a state budget.

There were other aspects of the Nationals' policy speech in 1983 which highlighted their intention to isolate, destabilise and delegitimise their former coalition partners. Perhaps most tellingly, the speech did not contain a single reference to the Liberal party or the Liberal party's contribution to coalition government since 1957. By ignoring the Liberals so pointedly, Joh Bjelke-Petersen made brutally clear his party's determination to exclude its former coalition partners totally, with the aim of squeezing them out in a polarised political climate. This strategy of isolation was underlined later in the campaign when the Nationals repeatedly lumped together the Liberals and the ALP on the issues of parliamentary and electoral reform. The intention behind this was presumably to create the impression that on such matters there was nothing to distinguish the two and that people who supported such measures might as well go "all the way" and vote for the Labor party.

The Nationals in their own right, 1983-1986

Following the election and the subsequent desertion of two Liberals to give them government in their own right, the Nationals persevered with the stridently promotional, defensive and desperately parochial style which had served the coalition government so well. In several important respects, however, the circumstances of government had now changed. Most importantly, the condition of the state's economy had weakened. Joh Bjelke-Petersen had built much of his reputation on the economic strength of Queensland and his government's ability to deliver the "economic goods". He had been extremely fortunate, however, in having able
treasurers to assist him - Gordon Chalk, Bill Knox, and Llew Edwards - all Liberals. During the years of coalition Joh Bjelke-Petersen had relied very considerably on these men for economic advice, as well as requiring them to absorb the heavy and detailed workload associated with the Treasury portfolio. With the coalition arrangement discarded, Bjelke-Petersen decided to allocate himself the dual roles of premier and treasurer, duties hitherto split as part of the coalition agreement. It was a decision he may soon have regretted, given his obvious discomfort with detailed economic debate.

During 1984 and 1985, and coinciding with an international downturn in mineral prices, several government and academic reports were released questioning the state’s general economic condition, particularly its narrow structural base; these reports also suggested that the Queensland economy was not performing as well as the economies in several Labor states. While neither Sir Joh nor most of his ministers acknowledged these criticisms in even the slightest way, the changed economic circumstances in the state presented some political problems for the government. Moreover, the refusal or inability of the premier to enter into serious debate on the economy did not inspire confidence either in his own performance as treasurer or his government’s willingness to address substantive economic concerns. On the contrary, Bjelke-Petersen’s increasingly intemperate outbursts in response to any individual or group criticism of him or of his government’s economic record gradually made the premier’s advanced age and level of astuteness a political issue.

For Joh Bjelke-Petersen, the Nationals’ triumph in 1983 represented the pinnacle of his political career. Yet the circumstances of that election - the disintegration of the coalition and the implosion of the state Liberal party - generated some doubt about the permanence of the realignment that had occurred at the poll. Also, the Nationals’ achievement in 1983 was secured by a premier then well into his seventies, but upon whom the fortunes of the government now predominantly depended. The electoral skills of the premier and his party machine were beyond dispute, but governance requires a different blend of competence, and the Nationals, now in sole occupancy of the Treasury benches, could
no longer rely on the prop provided by the Liberal party’s partnership in government. During the coalition the Nationals were far more street-smart than their Liberal partners, yet the Liberals over the years had provided a number of highly regarded cabinet ministers in complex portfolios.

The departure of the Liberals also posed other problems. One of the most significant of these was that, for the first time ever, the National party had no scapegoats on whom it could dump its problems. During the years of coalition the Nationals had basked in their tenure of a number of high-profile, largesse-pumping portfolios, at the same time sidestepping political fallout by saddling Liberal ministers with politically troublesome portfolios, such as Labour Relations, and also with one-off responsibilities for problematic issues. Furthermore, with the Liberal buffer removed, National party parliamentarians representing vulnerable metropolitan seats now bore the brunt of criticism when government decisions were unpopular with the Brisbane community. And although the number of National-held metropolitan electorates was modest, government by the Nationals in their own right depended on these seats being retained.

Changes within the National party’s own organisation also affected the circumstances of government. It is somewhat ironical that the critically supportive role provided by the National party organisation in assisting the party to broaden its electoral base in the south-east and, ultimately, to assist the Nationals to secure government in their own right, was not sustained thereafter. Not long after the 1983 election their longtime executive director, Mike Evans, resigned to move into private business. His successor, political director Col Walker, also departed his post fairly quickly, for medical reasons. These and later personnel movements were both uncharacteristic and destabilising for the party, and they most certainly related to the unusual amount of internal friction evident in National ranks after 1983.

In general terms, the Nationals endured a reasonably rocky first term of office in their own right. True, the government scored a major and apparently popular victory over the state’s power industry unions in early 1985. In other areas, however, the government’s performance was shakier: the premier’s indifferent
performance as treasurer has already been mentioned and the
government also was plagued by a series of scandals, some
internally damaging. During 1985 Sir Edward Lyons, a close
friend of the premier, relinquished his posts as TAB chairman and
National party trustee in the wake of a prolonged battle with Russ
Hinze, the Local Government and Racing minister. That struggle,
and Hinze's role in it, angered the premier and for a time called
into question Hinze's own position in cabinet. The government
was also beset by the political fallout which followed cabinet's
authorisation of police raids on alleged abortion clinics in Brisbane
and Townsville, an action which the public considered to be heavy-
headed. Severe embarrassment also surrounded criminal charges
against Allen Callaghan for misappropriating funds. Callaghan was
formerly press secretary to Sir Joh and, up until his enforced
resignation, permanent head of the Department of Arts, National
Parks, and Sport. Judith Callaghan, his wife, was secretary of the
Queensland Day Committee and had her own problems with the
law: in mid-1986 she was jailed for misappropriation of the
committee's funds.

An even more damaging scandal arose over the disclosure in
early 1986 that the state government planned to revoke 390
hectares of national park land on Lindeman Island. The govern-
ment's plan, it transpired, was to revert this area to freehold and
sell it to East-West Airlines, of which the Queensland chairman
was Sir Edward Lyons. The issue focused attention on the way the
government conducted business and generated hostility throughout
much of the state. The public were irritated by the government's
move to revoke the national park area without public consultation
or debate, and by the decision to sell the land to East-West
without calling public tenders. There was disquiet as well that
East-West's Queensland's operations were chaired by a confidant
of the premier. Not surprisingly, the government was accused of
cronyism. For their part, both Bjelke-Petersen and Lyons were
seen as handling the issue with an arrogant disregard for com-
community concerns; this was best exemplified by Sir Edward, who
told opponents of the venture that they could "go to hell" (Daily
Sun, 11 March 1986).
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There were other signs that the government was becoming increasingly accident-prone, and the party organisation unusually clumsy. Sir Joh's government was embarrassed just prior to the 1986 state election campaign by a surprisingly messy round of National party preselection battles, as well as by suggestions of an over-generous out-of-court settlement of a defamation action in the premier's favour from the Bond Corporation. Another controversy arose when the Primary Industries minister, Neil Turner, overruled an Agricultural Bank decision not to provide a loan for $145,000 to Michael Behan, a north Queensland grazier. Behan was a former National party Senate candidate and at the time a senior official in the party. The premier's churlish reference to criticism of the loan as a "lousy $145,000" did nothing to dampen public outrage. Indeed, the significance of the premier's gaffe was that, unlike many of his other remarks, that throwaway line may have generated misgivings not only in the south-east corner of the state but also in the National party's electoral heartland west of the Great Divide and in the coastal farming districts.

Repeating the success, 1986

Although the 1986 election campaign was not waged in circumstances as dramatic as the 1983 poll, its outcome was viewed as at least as potentially enduring. The Nationals had won government without the aid of the Liberals in the special circumstances of 1983 and had snared the hitherto elusive metropolitan base in the process. Those achievements were on trial in 1986, as was the somewhat patchy record of the Nationals' first term in office. Above all else, however, the 1986 poll provided the opportunity to confirm the realignment amongst the state's non-Labor voters which had occurred in 1983.

The Nationals won again in 1986; indeed they did so relatively comfortably. This was despite an uncharacteristically poor campaign effort on their part - poor, at least, until the last three or four days before voting. Over the preceding decade Queenslanders had become accustomed to the slick, professional election campaigns which party president Sir Robert Sparkes and executive
director Mike Evans masterminded. Little of that professionalism was apparent in 1986. The difficulties commenced at the very outset, when the impact of their policy launch on the public was overshadowed by embarrassing news coverage the same day of the failure of the Nationals' Sherwood candidate, former Brisbane town clerk Tony Philbrick, to lodge his nomination by the noon deadline. The party suffered more embarrassment within a few days when it had to withdraw, for further editing, one of its TV commercials which contained unauthorised footage of Queensland and Australian Rugby League captain, Wally Lewis.

At a more substantial level the Nationals had to contend during the campaign with allegations of cronyism within the state government made by one of the party's own trustees, Sir Roderick Proctor. These allegations, aired on ABC TV, immediately gave legitimacy to the ALP and Liberal campaigns, both of which were heavily emphasising the issues of corruption and cronyism in the wake of the Lindeman Island affair and the Allen and Judith Callaghan scandals. The flames of the corruption issue were fanned during the campaign when it was confirmed that Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen had indeed received $400,000 from Alan Bond in compensation for an allegedly defamatory statement broadcast on 2 February 1983 by the QTQ Channel 9 current affairs programme Today Tonight. Bond had paid the amount to Sir Joh shortly after assuming ownership of the television channel.

With this array of troubles the Nationals were finding it difficult, almost impossible, to control the campaign agenda. And even when the focus did turn to one of their favourite traditional issues - the support and defence of Queensland's economic record - they found themselves unable to score points as easily or as effectively as in the past. The Nationals' own market research was also confirming that Sir Joh's personal stocks were softening; even his attempts to "federalise" the campaign (that is, blame the federal government for Queensland's ills) failed when the Hawke government ignored or sidestepped most of Bjelke-Petersen's taunts.

Despite their problems the Nationals did regroup in the last few days of the campaign, and in the event marginally improved their overall primary tally from 38.9 per cent in 1983 to 39.6. They did so because they spent considerably more on their campaign than
their opponents, and because in the end they apparently convinced undecided voters that the return of the Nationals was preferable to the instability of a "hung" parliament, that is, one in which no party commands a majority. Throughout the campaign Bjelke-Petersen had bitterly traded blows with the Liberals over the issue of electoral reform and continually discounted any possibility of a return to coalition. As a campaign ploy, he had actually threatened to call a fresh election if the first outcome was unsatisfactory. Political observers may have been astounded by such a statement, yet its underlying assumption - that voters preferred stability - was probably very sound.

Explaining the Nationals' buoyancy

One of the more intriguing aspects of Queensland politics over the Bjelke-Petersen years, and one of more than passing interest to Sir Joh's successors, has been the extent to which the National party's support base, certainly in the period before the Fitzgerald Inquiry, remained loyal in the face of an almost constant barrage of embarrassments and controversy. Of course it is the case that in particular issues the stocks of both party and party leader dipped momentarily. Yet the electorate's personal approval of the premier in August 1986 (the last Morgan survey before the announcement of the election date) was exactly the same as it was in the Morgan poll immediately before the 1983 election - 50 per cent. Support for the National party over that period was correspondingly buoyant, as the election results showed.

There are various explanations for this quite remarkable buoyancy, a number of which turn on Bjelke-Petersen's position and performance. Throughout his premiership Sir Joh created an image for himself as the formidable protector and defender of Queensland and, in the process, acquired almost cult status for himself with a significant proportion of the electorate. The identification of Joh Bjelke-Petersen with Queensland was honed, literally, to an artform during the 1983 state campaign, when the National party distributed, and featured in their advertising, a large wall-poster sketch of a besuited Bjelke-Petersen accompanied by the simple captions "Joh" and "Queensland". After 1983 the
Nationals extended this further, bluntly appealing in the government's classified advertising to Queenslanders' innate sense of superiority and individualism: "Queensland. A Stronger state. A better life"; "The Queensland government. Providing more jobs"; "Queensland. Getting on with Business"; "Queensland. State of the Future"; "Queensland. Australia's Growth State"; not to mention the Main Roads Department's contribution to this campaign, "Paving the way for Queensland". And when the Nationals were on the defensive in the lead-up to the 1986 poll, they managed to work these various themes together in their election slogan "Nationals. There's never been a greater need".

Even though the Nationals' performance in government since 1983 had been shaky, they were able to tap that large political reservoir created over the years by their successful articulation and mortgaging of what political scientist Brian Head describes in a different context as the ideology of "Queenslandism". This has enabled the state government not only to legitimise its position against rival political parties but also to argue that any criticism of its behaviour - whether internal (within the state) or external (from Canberra or elsewhere) - is anti-Queensland, un-Queensland, and thus wrong. In that sense, Bjelke-Petersen's continued reference in the 1983 campaign to the state ALP leader, Keith Wright, as "Mr Wrong" was hardly accidental.

This strategy of Sir Joh and the Nationals of equating their own position on any issue vigorously and automatically with that of Queensland, and their vicious defence of that position against any and all others, worked brilliantly to their advantage over the years. It did so first in the 1974 state election when the ALP's parliamentary numbers were reduced to the strength of a cricket team after a campaign dominated by pungent exchanges between the premier and the prime minister, Gough Whitlam, and Bjelke-Petersen's cultivation of images of Canberra threatening the interests and sovereignty of Queensland. In the 1983 election the strategy was equally successful, although this time the threat to the state was an internal one: the Liberals were depicted by the Nationals as having deserted the government, thus abrogating their responsibilities to Queensland.
The formula which the Nationals have so ably adopted is not novel in the context of twentieth century Queensland politics. Joh Bjelke-Petersen’s agrarian rhetoric, his championing of state’s rights, his anti-Communism, his intimidation of the media, and his faith in unlimited development were no more strident than the views and actions of predecessors such as Forgan Smith, ALP premier from 1932 to 1942. Nor were Bjelke-Petersen’s assaults on Canberra any more feverish than those of another Labor premier, Ned Hanlon, later in the 1940s; the same two premierships also shared another more dubious distinction, the application of zonal gerrymanders. Attacks on elements of the trade union movement and tough industrial legislation were hallmarks of Bjelke-Petersen’s premiership, yet such actions are hardly distinguishable in style from the determination of earlier governments, such as those of McCormack, Hanlon, and Gair (all Labor), and Nicklin (Country party-led coalition) to suppress militant unions.

The Bjelke-Petersen government was also not the first in Queensland to be touched by allegations of personal corruption, though no premier’s administration has been so smothered by such allegations as Sir Joh’s, albeit that many of these were not aired until after his retirement from politics. In this respect, too, there have been precedents: the premierships of two early Labor leaders, E.G. Theodore and William McCormack, were badly tarnished, after both had left office, by the Mungana affair. This scandal emerged during the Great Depression when it was discovered that Theodore (by then federal treasurer) and McCormack held interests in a company which sold mining leases to the government at a considerable profit. The public outcry prompted a royal commission and, later, a civil prosecution.

There has developed in Queensland over the years a consensus about what is good for the state. Economic development, particularly in the rural areas, has been regarded as the key to long-term success, ensuring prosperity and also the survival of the rural way of life which has been seen to be so spiritually important to Queensland’s character. In terms of this folklore any limitation placed upon the state’s developmentalist aspirations was unwelcome. A political environment has thus emerged which tends to be much more receptive to notions of strong leadership and
strong, stable and purposeful government (that is, "delivering the goods" for Queensland) than it is to niceties relating to the conduct of government.

Labor's split in 1957 caused a realignment of Queensland politics, with the Country party's base of support allowing it to succeed to much of the ALP's turf outside the metropolitan area. At the same time, the Country party-led coalition retained and further tailored the zone-based electoral structure introduced in 1949 by the Hanlon Labor government. The effect was to ensure that the Liberal party's ambitions were continually thwarted. Indeed, the Liberals, at successive state elections up to and including 1974, continued to outpoll the Country (later National) party, yet the effect of that zonal arrangement, coupled with the long-time agreement of the coalition parties not to contest each other's seats, ensured the Liberal party's continued junior status in the coalition government.

Over the decade to 1986, then, the National party managed not only to retain its traditional rural constituency, but also to extend its base of support to metropolitan Brisbane. Significantly, too, the regime-building potential of Sir Joh's particular brand of Right populism allowed his party to make significant inroads into working-class areas hitherto loyal to the ALP. Indeed, one of Bjelke-Petersen's skills was his ability to equate his position, and his party's, with Queensland's interests in such a way as to cultivate support from people who were prepared to vote for the party despite its ideology and behaviour, and against their own economic self-interest. Meantime, the electorate was encouraged to regard the role adopted by the Opposition as having nothing constructive to contribute, given that any criticism it offered was interpreted as an impediment to the process of government and thus, by definition, unhelpful and un-Queensland.

Sir Joh's painful exit

Instead of basking in the glory of his government being returned once again in its own right at the 1986 general election, and perhaps preparing himself for a graceful retirement from the political stage, Sir Joh took the improbable step of announcing his
intention to seek the prime ministership. Despite his age he was obviously still ambitious and probably concluded that he had achieved all there was to be gained from Queensland politics. He could now offer his brand of leadership to the nation, adding the scalp of Bob Hawke's federal Labor government to his political belt and at the same time rescuing the federal conservative parties from their leadership crisis.

A number of Bjelke-Petersen’s ministerial colleagues, however, harboured grave misgivings about his Canberra plans. At a country cabinet meeting on 16 February 1987 held, ironically, at Kingaroy, a number of them pleaded with him to remain in Queensland. They were concerned not only about the federal offensive failing but also about the survival prospects of the Queensland Nationals without him. Sir Joh, however, was determined to proceed.

The "Joh for PM" campaign was launched over the Christmas-New Year recess, a traditionally quiet political period chosen presumably to maximise media coverage. It attracted widespread public curiosity. There were reports that privately commissioned market research supposedly indicated public support for the campaign, while one of Sir Joh’s principal backers, Sanctuary Cove developer Mike Gore, indicated that strong bankrolling of the campaign was available from the business community, perhaps to the extent of $15 million. Within a relatively short time, however, the "Joh for PM" drive stalled, for a number of reasons: lack of public support; inability to mobilise a nationally based campaign infrastructure; and, in more general terms, failure on the part of Bjelke-Petersen and his supporters to understand Australian federal politics and the Australian electorate.

The failure of the "Joh for PM" strategy was deeply humiliating for the Queensland premier, who had built much of his personal reputation on his ability to outmanoeuvre his opponents. In this instance, however, he had failed not only to secure the keys to the Lodge, but also even to contest a federal seat. And far from wrecking a federal Labor government, Sir Joh’s antics actively assisted his political opponents by destabilising the conservative parties. The prime minister, Bob Hawke, capitalised on this disarray within the non-Labor ranks by calling a double dissolution
election for 11 July 1987. At that poll the ALP government was returned with an increased majority, albeit with a reduced vote. Bjelke-Petersen was blamed by many on the conservative side of politics for creating much of the turmoil within the non-Labor parties which led to their third successive federal election defeat. Worse for the Queensland premier, however, the election results indicated that Labor had done well in terms of both seats and votes in Queensland. In other words, Sir Joh was perceived as having mounted a campaign which not only had destabilised the non-Labor parties federally, as well as itself failed, but also had backfired in his own backyard.

Sir Joh’s Canberra plans also distracted his energies from his obligations as premier and state treasurer over a number of months. During this period the Nationals’ state government in Queensland was perceived as not addressing the severe economic difficulties confronting the state. Friction was also created within the Bjelke-Petersen cabinet by the premier’s apparent anointing of Bill Gunn as the next premier. Gunn, while obviously grateful for Sir Joh’s endorsement, was nevertheless sensitive to the public perception of himself as a Bjelke-Petersen clone. During this period as acting premier he took a number of steps to distance himself from his leader, the most significant being his role in establishing the Fitzgerald Inquiry and supporting its work. Another was his decision to nominate Sir Robert Sparkes for another term as party president, despite Bjelke-Petersen’s opposition to Sir Robert. The effect of these events, coupled with opinion poll evidence signalling a decline in support for Sir Joh, was a much closer questioning of the premier’s performance and political judgment. Needless to say, Bjelke-Petersen did not appreciate such questioning; he felt he had led the Queensland National party to its greatest achievements and he should be left free by his party to determine his own future, in particular, the nature and timing of his departure from state politics. The concern of many Nationals, however, was that Sir Joh’s political vocabulary simply did not include the word retirement.

Bjelke-Petersen’s difficulties worsened. At the National party’s State Council meeting at Rockhampton in October 1987 the premier bitterly contested a motion, which State Council subse-
quently endorsed, that ministers be required to step down from their portfolios a reasonable time before their retirement. The premier indicated his disillusionment with the party. The events which took place at the meeting confirmed to Bjelke-Petersen that his party now perceived him as an electoral liability. He and Sir Robert Sparkes were also urged to cease hostilities. Within a matter of days after the meeting, however, Sir Joh renewed his criticism of the party president and, in a misguided ploy to keep the premiership secure, threatened to call a snap election and to take the party down with him if it moved on him.

These actions only served to underline party and public concern about his performance and judgment. On 8 October Sir Joh, now aware that his party had tired of his antics, blunted any immediate threat to his position by announcing (almost twelve months in advance) his preferred retirement date of 8 August 1988, his twentieth anniversary as premier. The announcement was greeted with scepticism by some National party members who believed that the premier was playing for time; they were convinced that he would not be able to contain for long his anger toward the party president and other Nationals with whom he differed personally or on policy priorities. Even at this stage, however, most state Nationals still hoped that Sir Joh would be allowed to see out his preferred term, in view of his contribution to the party over many years.

With Sir Joh's departure from state politics now apparently assured, the National party, at its annual state conference at Townsville in November 1987, set about the task of preparing for the post-Bjelke-Petersen era. In policy terms this translated into endorsement of the position of Sir Robert Sparkes, and rejection of Sir Joh, on a number of issues. These included the introduction of condom vending machines, some liberalisation of the party's stance on prostitution, the provision of sex education during school hours, and the establishment of a foreign land register. Bjelke-Petersen was also rebuffed by the conference on his insistence that Japanese developer Yohachiro Iwasaki be given trusteeship of land proposed as national park near Iwasaki's holiday resort at Yeppoon on the central Queensland coast. Even worse for Sir Joh's position, Sir Robert Sparkes was re-elected party president,
with some 80 per cent of the votes cast (Sir Robert Sparkes 528 votes, Professor Hiram Caton 89, Les Whykes 47). This was a serious defeat for the premier, who had lobbied strongly against the incumbent president. Even Sir Joh's loyal deputy, Bill Gunn, expressed the view that the premier was "out of tune" and that he should "go fishing, have a rest and do a fair bit of thinking" (Courier-Mail, 9 November 1987).

The Townsville conference left Sir Joh deeply embittered, and his public comments in the days following indicated that the party's crisis might require resolution in advance of his stated retirement date. In the event, it was Bjelke-Petersen himself who single-handedly effected his own demise. On Monday 23 and Tuesday 24 November 1987 Sir Joh paid three separate visits to the Queensland governor, Sir Walter Campbell, formerly chief justice of the Supreme Court. Sir Joh's purpose was to discuss the quite remarkable contents of two separate letters he had written to Sir Walter on those days. In the first, dated 23 November 1987, Bjelke-Petersen requested the resignation of his entire ministry and sought a new commission for himself to form a new administration. He attempted to justify the request by arguing that, in light of the report of the Public Sector Review Committee (which, incidentally, had been submitted to the government five months beforehand), there was suddenly "an urgent need to make major changes to the structure of my administration, including a reduction in the number of Ministerial portfolios". On the very next day, however, and obviously in light of discussions with the governor, Sir Joh amended his view, now indicating that he considered it "to be appropriate to retain the existing number of eighteen (18) Ministers".

In the second letter he also requested that the commissions of three ministers, who had refused his request to resign, should be withdrawn. Sir Joh explained his request, to which the governor agreed, in the terms that "these persons are not prepared to conform to the policies I have laid down for my administration". Although Sir Joh's written request was for three ministers to be fired, he in fact had originally sought the removal of five, a matter confirmed in Sir Walter's letter to Sir Joh of 25 November. This letter, and the two letters from the premier to the governor, are
reproduced on the following pages. Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen had summoned individually each of the five ministers targeted for dismissal, and requested their resignations. Peter McKechnie was reportedly told by the premier he was being sacked for showing insufficient loyalty. Geoff Muntz was apparently given no reason. Brian Austin’s removal was sought because he had been seen speaking with Sir Robert Sparkes at the party’s state conference. Mike Ahern was targeted for alleged leaking and moral irresponsibility. Bill Gunn, Sir Joh’s deputy, was being sacked for nominating Sir Robert Sparkes for another term as party president. After all five refused to resign Sir Joh relented, now insisting on the resignations of only three: Ahern, Austin and McKechnie. The premier then arranged for two new ministers to be sworn in: Kevin Lingard, hitherto the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, and Gordon Simpson, MLA for Cooroora. Three other backbenchers had been offered portfolios by Sir Joh - Brian Little-proud, Max Menzell and Russell Cooper - but all refused because of the circumstances surrounding the offers. It was surprising that Lingard and Simpson accepted appointment as Sir Joh was clearly within days of losing office. ABC radio journalist Doug Weller, who attended the swearing-in of the two new ministers, captured the situation well when, in the presence of the governor, he called to one of them, "Mr Lingard, do you regard this as a career move?"

It transpired that the governor was not persuaded by the premier’s strategy during these critical days. This was hardly surprising. The collapse of Sir Joh’s support within the parliamentary National party was plainly evident. The governor was separately informed to this effect by Bill Gunn, Mike Ahern and Brian Austin. Sir Walter Campbell thus interpreted events as a political crisis rather than a constitutional one, and encouraged a party room resolution. In the letter to Sir Joh of 25 November, the governor made clear that he had no doubts about the fragility of the premier’s position. He resisted both Sir Joh’s original advice for the resignation of the full ministry, as well as the stated grounds for that proposed action. Sir Walter then directly counselled Sir Joh that "should you resign as Premier, it may be that I may not re-commission you as Premier unless I was of the
view that you were able to form a new Ministry and that you would be able to obtain the confidence and support of the Parliament." Because of the governor's interpretation of the crisis, Sir Joh's audacious bid to retain power was thwarted. The premier's remaining backbench support collapsed and Mike Ahern and Bill Gunn both announced their candidacy for the party leadership, which was to be determined at a meeting of the caucus scheduled for Thursday, 26 November.

Even as this meeting approached, Sir Joh clung to office. He threatened to recall parliament, he reportedly attempted to secure a deal with the state ALP, he questioned the standing of the proposed parliamentary party meeting (see Appendix A), and he indicated a preparedness to call a snap general election. All these actions were ploys designed to unsettle his party adversaries and allow him to regroup. Yet it was these same actions, as well as his attempted dismissal of five ministers and of the successful sacking of three of them, which increased the concern in the National party about Sir Joh's political judgment. Even worse for the premier, his actions were being perceived by many senior people within his own party's hierarchy as those of a desperate and vengeful man who was convinced he was greater than his party and who was prepared ultimately to place his own self-preservation ahead of the Nationals' long-term interests. Repeatedly Sir Joh asserted that his party would be finished without him.

The 26 November 1987 caucus meeting was attended by forty-eight of the forty-nine National members of parliament: Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen was the absentee. In a last desperate bid to salvage his position he called together his seventeen ministers just an hour before the parliamentary party meeting and urged them not to vote on any leadership motions. The call went unheeded, however, and at the caucus meeting the leadership spill motion was carried by thirty-nine votes to eight, with one abstention. Three candidates - Mike Ahern, Bill Gunn and Russ Hinze - then contested the leadership secret ballot. Ahern won on the first ballot with thirty votes; Gunn received sixteen votes and Hinze just two votes. Gunn was then re-elected unopposed as deputy leader. Immediately after the meeting Ahern telephoned the governor to advise him of the result. He also arranged to forward to
Your Excellency,

You will recall that in December 1986 my Government established the Public Sector Review Committee to examine the administrative machinery of the Queensland Government.

One of the specific objectives of the Review on which the Committee was asked to report was the elimination of the duplication or overlap of functions or activities amongst Departments and Statutory Authorities.

The Committee submitted its Report last July and since that date my Government has been implementing a large number of the recommendations contained in the Report.

I have now given very careful consideration to the Ministerial control of the various Departments of the Public Service and I have concluded that there is an urgent need to make major changes to the structure of my administration, including a reduction in the number of Ministerial portfolios.

I believe that this re-organisation necessitates the resignation of my entire Ministry.

I therefore propose tendering to Your Excellency, on a date to be mutually agreed upon, the resignation of myself, and thereby placing at Your Excellency's disposal the offices of all of the members of my Ministry. At the same time, I seek a further Commission from Your Excellency to form a new administration.

If Your Excellency sees fit to concur with these proposals, on receipt of Your Excellency's advice, I will set the necessary sequence of action in train.

Yours sincerely,

PREMIER.

His Excellency the Honourable Sir Walter Campbell, Q.C., Governor of Queensland, Government House, BRISBANE. 4000

Above and right. Correspondence from Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen to Governor Sir Walter Campbell at the time of the National party's leadership crisis in late 1987.

Your Excellency,

Further to our discussion this morning concerning my intention to restructure the Ministerial portfolios, I desire to inform you that, in accordance with advice offered by you, I have placed my proposals before my Ministerial colleagues assembled in a full meeting of Cabinet.

As you know from my discussion with you, I have re-examined my original proposal to reduce the number of portfolios and I now consider it to be appropriate to retain the existing number of eighteen (18) Ministers.

You are also aware that I have asked three of my Ministers to submit their resignations, as I consider that these persons are not prepared to conform to the policies I have laid down for my administration.

The three Ministers declined to submit their resignations when asked by me earlier today and have again declined to submit their resignations sought of them at the Cabinet meeting this afternoon.

I therefore tender my formal advice to Your Excellency that the Commissions held by the Minister for Health and Environment, the Minister for Mines and Energy and Minister for the Arts, and the Minister for Industry and Technology be withdrawn.

I should be grateful for an early indication of Your Excellency’s preparedness to act upon my advice in order that I can initiate the necessary action to restructure my administration.

Yours sincerely,

PREMIER.

His Excellency the Honourable Sir Walter Campbell, Q.C., Governor of Queensland, Government House, BRISBANE. 4001
Dear Premier,

I refer to your letters to me dated respectively 23rd November, 1987 and 24th November, 1987, and also to your discussion with me at Government House on 23rd November and to two further discussions on 24th November, 1987.

First, in reply to your letter of 24th November, I advised you that day that I did not consider your suggestion to resign as Premier and to seek a further commission to form a new administration was the appropriate course for the achievement of a restructuring of the Ministerial portfolios. I advised you that, should you resign as Premier, it may be that I may not re-commission you as Premier unless I was of the view that you were able to form a new Ministry and that you would be able to obtain the confidence and support of the Parliament.

I also advised you at that time that, in my opinion, it would be wise for you to discuss with all your Ministers your proposed restructuring of the Ministry. You told me that you had clear and firm proposals to this end although you did not place them before me. You told me that you had not discussed this restructuring with your Ministers, although the Cabinet had met that morning. You also told me at that time that your intention was that five present Ministers would not be included in the new Ministry. I suggested to you that you should request each Minister whom you did not wish to continue as a Minister to resign his commission. You told me that you had not done this.

When you called on me again the following morning you informed me that you had, that morning, requested the five Ministers - whose names for the first time were then mentioned by you to me - to resign and that each had refused to do so. During that discussion you told me that your intention at that time was to ask for the resignation of only three Ministers and not five. However, you said you had not explained the nature of the restructuring to the Ministers as a whole. Following upon that discussion you left me saying that you would call a meeting of the full Cabinet and inform them fully of the nature of the restructuring.

The Honourable Sir Joh. Bjelke-Petersen,
K.C.M.G., M.L.A.,
Premier and Treasurer of Queensland,
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Letter from the governor of Queensland to the premier in response to proposals Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen made during the leadership crisis.
You informed me, in the letter of 24th November, 1987, and also in the second discussion with me held late on that day, that you had placed your proposals concerning the nature of the restructuring of the Ministerial portfolios before a full meeting of the Cabinet, and that you had, at that Cabinet Meeting, asked for the resignation of three Ministers and that the three Ministers concerned had declined once again to submit their resignations to you.

Your advice to me is that the commissions presently held by these three Ministers be withdrawn. These Ministers are:-

1. The Minister for Health and Environment;
2. The Minister for Mines and Energy and Minister for The Arts; and
3. The Minister for Industry and Technology.

Acting in accordance with your advice I told you that I would be prepared, in the circumstances, to terminate the commissions held by these three Ministers.

I told you that, as a result of your proposed restructuring of the Ministry, I would be prepared to hold a swearing-in of all relevant Ministers, including the three new Ministers and Members of the Executive Council as well as those present Ministers who will, in your restructured Ministry, assume altered Ministerial responsibilities. In accordance with your request I told you that I would be prepared to hold that ceremony at Government House today.

The time we agreed upon for the holding of the ceremony was 10.30 a.m., but it was brought to my attention this morning that Government House had been informed earlier this morning that the paperwork necessitated a later time.

You again called on me at 10.00 a.m. today and told me that you were still in the process of discussing the Ministerial restructuring with your Ministers. You indicated to me then that there may now be only two new Ministers to be included in the rearranged Ministry, and also that possibly only a further six or seven existing Ministers would now be subject to portfolio changes. You agreed to deliver to me full details of the restructured Ministry prior to the swearing-in ceremony so that I would have the opportunity to peruse that document before the ceremony. You then said that you would discuss the time for the holding of the ceremony with me after this was done.

Yours sincerely,

Governor
Government House a document in which forty-eight members of the caucus confirmed their support for his leadership (see Appendix B). Then began the attempts over several days to convince Sir Joh to resign.

With his parliamentary party support now destroyed, and with his removal from office now only a matter of time, Bjelke-Petersen finally succumbed. In a prepared statement to a prime-time televised press conference on 1 December 1987 he announced his resignation as premier and as member for Barambah, effective immediately. In doing so he also indicated his deep disaffection with his party.

The National party of today is not the party that I took to the election last year. The policies of the National Party are no longer those on which I went to the people. Therefore I have no wish to lead this Government any longer. It was my intention to take this matter to the floor of State Parliament. However, I now have no further interest in leading the National Party any further. (Transcript of press statement as reproduced in the *Courier-Mail*, 2 December 1987)

**Ahern's Challenges**

The forced and agonised departure from state politics of Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen was an unhappy event for the Nationals, yet there was a sense of relief for most of the party that the ordeal was over. Opinion polls showed voter approval of the new premier. Ahern promised a "vision of excellence" for Queensland, a view of the state's future which combined continued traditional emphasis on economic development with a new style of leadership strongly characterised by its accountability. The new premier also pledged a more consultative approach to decision-making and an administration that would keep in touch with community attitudes; presumably this was an indirect reference to Sir Joh's unwillingness to respond to changing attitudes (including National party attitudes) on issues such as sex education or foreign ownership of land.
The Ahern "honeymoon" was short-lived. Sir Joh, still wanting to wield power, made it plain that he would neither accept Mike Ahern as premier nor forgive party president Sir Robert Sparkes for his involvement in the events which forced his departure. Worse still for the Nationals, Bjelke-Petersen waged a bitter campaign of disaffection very publicly and, in doing so, promoted the theme of party disunity. Several of the ministerial colleagues of Sir Joh who had been dropped from cabinet by the new premier - Russ Hinze, Lin Powell, Don Lane and Yvonne Chapman - were also vocal in their criticism of Mike Ahern, thus publicly exposing party disunity. Less visibly, though just as importantly, Sir Joh's rancour had an unsettling effect at the branch level. Although the majority of Nationals appeared to endorse the leadership change, a minority of party branches - including a significant number in the coastal farming belt and the western areas - appeared to sympathise with Bjelke-Petersen. From the outset, then, the internal party hostilities with which Ahern had to contend were quite unprecedented for the Queensland National party. They were also extraordinarily dangerous for the Nationals, given that they had long flaunted their reputation as the only party in Queensland able to offer stable and cohesive leadership.

Apart from this internal haemorrhaging, the National party had to contend with the grim revelations of the Fitzgerald Inquiry. For many years Sir Joh and the Nationals had paraded themselves as a government which, as well as stridently promoting Queensland's economic advancement, actively protected and defended the northern state's political and moral virtue. Within a year of Bjelke-Petersen's retirement, however, the reputation of his administration was in tatters. The Bjelke-Petersen era was in disgrace as a period when both personal and institutional corruption had been allowed to flourish unchecked.

The inquiry presented Mike Ahern with a major opportunity to distinguish his new administration from that of his predecessor. Unlike many members of the National party, who may have harboured serious worries about Tony Fitzgerald's penetrating lines of investigation, Ahern and Bill Gunn unequivocally supported it. Their intention was to represent the Ahern ministry as a completely new government watching events unfold with the
concern only of an interested bystander. To some commentators this approach was puzzling, as most members of the Ahern ministry had also been members of the Bjelke-Petersen cabinet and so should have been acutely embarrassed by the spectacular revelations. Certainly Labor's new parliamentary leader Wayne Goss, and his state campaign director, Wayne Swan, exploited the situation in those terms. Toward the end of 1988, in one of the parliament's non-sitting weeks, they launched a television and radio campaign targeted directly at the new premier's political underbelly. The television advertisement depicted a blindfolded and gagged Mike Ahern with his ears plugged. The message was clear: Ahern had been a member of state parliament for twenty years and a minister for the previous eight; as such, he was in no position to dissociate himself from events within that period.

Ahern's strong public support for the Fitzgerald Inquiry was understandable, however, if viewed as an attempt to rebuild political momentum in Queensland out of the disintegration of the Bjelke-Petersen regime and thereby recapture the initiative for the National party. He was very much a new premier, enjoying the support of the parliamentary and organisational wings, but more slender grassroots support and limited public credibility. Ahern viewed the inquiry as a necessary amputation of entrenched corruption in the state in the interests of the long-term survival of the government.

But Mike Ahern also had to contend with some more immediate problems stemming from the Fitzgerald Inquiry. The seemingly endless revelations of corruption seriously undermined the capacity of the National party to govern in its accustomed manner. It was impossible to maintain party unity in the face of the allegations. The inquiry had started out as a limited investigation into alleged police misconduct but had emerged as a wide-ranging investigation into the way things have been done in Queensland for a very long time. Not surprisingly, this touched off a number of pressure points inside the National party machine. Individuals or groups who had been part of the decision-making structure and who had been beneficiaries of corrupt arrangements were obviously threatened. Some of these people were unlikely to stand idly by
while a public investigation established by their own party scrutinised their behaviour.

The National party’s self-confidence was rattled, too, by very large adverse swings in one federal and two state by-elections during 1988, although it was less certain whether the results of those contests were directly attributable to voter disapproval of the new premier or to the allegations of systematic abuse of public office. Sir Joh, however, was convinced that the National party’s problems largely derived from the leadership of Sir Robert Sparkes and Mike Ahern. Bjelke-Petersen’s public intervention served only to aggravate instability in the National party during this period. Fortunately for Sparkes and Ahern, however, the former premier’s own public standing continued to slump as the inquiry investigations continued.

Ahern’s government was threatened at an even deeper level. A Commonwealth referendum seeking to apply the one vote-one value principle to all lower house electoral systems in Australia had dire implications for Queensland’s longstanding zonal electoral system. The Nationals were appalled, arguing that the measure represented another unwanted and unwarranted intrusion by the Commonwealth into the affairs of Queensland and other states. If the one vote-one value proposition succeeded in the referendum, the electoral building blocks of the National party’s power base in Queensland would be destroyed.
Zoning to Stay in Power

Crucial to the National party's political foundation in Queensland is the state's zonal electoral system. Ironically, this system was introduced by the Hanlon Labor government in 1949. It segregates voters into several geographical zones, at the same time placing significantly different weighting on the value of votes cast in those zones. As the accompanying map illustrates, four such zones presently exist, with predetermined numbers of electorates allocated to each zone. The South-Eastern zone contains the largest number of seats, with 51 of the state's 89 electorates. Two more zones cover the coastal belt extending northward to Cairns. One of these, the Provincial Cities zone (with 13 seats), is geographically discontinuous, embracing the major urban centres dotted along the coastline; the other, the Country zone (with 17 seats), meanders down the eastern seaboard taking in the coastal farmlands behind the regional centres. The remaining zone, the Western and Far Northern, comprises 8 seats which, together, cover the state's large geographical expanse westward of the Great Dividing Range.

The number of voters per seat varies considerably across the zones, according to the quotas which have been prescribed under the Electoral Districts Act (for a definition of quota, see under Table 1, p.37). These variations indicate the degree of "weightage" attached to votes cast in different parts of the state. Using 1986 official government figures, the average number of voters in a South-Eastern zone seat was 19,357, in the Provincial Cities 18,149, in the Country zone 13,131 and in the Western and Far Northern zone 9186. That is to say, the value of a vote cast in the urban south-east of the state may be less than half that of a ballot cast...
Queensland's electoral zones

Western and Far Northern zone (8 seats)

Country zone (17 seats)

Provincial Cities zone (13 seats)

South-Eastern zone (51 seats)
in the western area. And because of the historically irregular frequency of Redistributions in Queensland, that variation has sometimes been very much greater. Immediately prior to the 1985-86 redistribution, for example, the near-Brisbane electorate of Fassifern contained more than 32,000 voters, while the western seat of Warrego contained fewer than 8000 electors.

Supporters of the zonal arrangements usually argue that in a decentralised state such as Queensland the vast rural areas warrant special attention and therefore greater political representation. Sir Robert Sparkes regards this approach as providing equality of representation. By that he means representation of interest groups and geographical expanses, but not equality of representation for all people regardless of where they live. In practice, however, Queensland's zonal system has been crafted, and periodically modified, by a succession of governments whose overriding interest has been not the compensation of rural disadvantage but electoral self-preservation and the maximisation of partisan advantage.

When in 1949 the then premier, Ned Hanlon, discarded the Queensland ALP's longstanding commitment to one vote-one value in favour of the zonal system, he attempted to justify the measure by citing problems faced by the rural areas and the need to ensure that city-based interests did not become all-pervasive. The true reason, however, was political expediency. The population in the country areas, where the ALP at that time enjoyed strong political support (especially in the mining areas), was diminishing. In the face of this eroding electoral base the government reasoned that to preserve itself in office it needed to increase the value of country votes and, thus, the number of Labor seats in state parliament. The experiment worked impressively, enabling the government to retain office in 1950 by a margin of nine seats, 42 to 33, despite being outpolled in primary votes by their political opponents (46.9 per cent to 49.2 per cent).

Following the Labor government's self-destruction and subsequent poll defeat in 1957, the incoming Country party-led coalition government moved swiftly to modify the zonal arrangement to its own advantage. Three zones were now created, replacing the existing four, including for the first time a Provincial Cities zone which was incorporated to contain Labor support in the non-
metropolitan areas. At the same time, the strong rural weightage enshrined in the 1949 legislation was retained in the 1958 model. The Country party's ascendancy over its Liberal party partners was underlined at the election in 1960 when the Country party won many non-urban seats held by the ALP prior to its split. The Liberal party's vote, on the other hand, was corralled in the Brisbane metropolitan area.

Joh Bjelke-Petersen, as premier, presided over three redistributions, those in 1971 and 1977 under coalition arrangements, and that of 1985-86 under National party government. All of them changed the number and spread of seats within zones and modified slightly the zones themselves. But the dominant feature of each redistribution was the unashamed vote weightage built into the legislation governing it. This was despite the trenchant criticism of the original 1949 Hanlon proposals by Joh Bjelke-Petersen, then an Opposition backbencher:

In this legislation the people are given the right of voting, admittedly, but the odds are so greatly against them that to achieve the results they desire is impossible because the predetermined zones and the numbers set out will mean nothing but that the majority will be ruled by the minority. (Speech by Joh Bjelke-Petersen to Legislative Assembly, 29 March 1949)

Over the last twenty years several other states and the Commonwealth have moved toward more equitable electoral arrangements, and have sought to protect, by statute, such arrangements from partisan interference. In Queensland, however, there has been absolutely no reflection of those trends. On the contrary Bjelke-Petersen, his ministers and various National party officials frequently attacked and ridiculed concepts of electoral justice and the one vote-one value principle, or took solace by reminding interviewers that it was the ALP which introduced the zonal system in Queensland. In March 1977 Russ Hinze, one of the most senior members of the Queensland cabinet at the time, went somewhat further in indicating what he regarded as a desirable step for the Queensland government to take in this area, particularly having regard to trends elsewhere:
I told the Premier, If you want the boundaries rigged, let me do it, and we’ll stay in power forever. If you don’t do it, people will say you are stupid. In South Australia Steele Hall redistributed himself out of office. I don’t think you’ll be able to blame Joh or me for doing anything like that. (Quoted in Deane Wells, *The Deep North*, Melbourne: Outback Press, 1979, p.87)

Russ Hinze’s offer to his premier was a generous one, though judging by his own much later statements to the Fitzgerald Inquiry, he already was convinced that the boundaries were rigged. Responding under cross-examination to a question from Matt Foley, representing the ALP, Hinze stated: "I’ve carried the National Party, unlike some of the seats in Queensland that are rigged to the extent that the boundaries - that all you have to do is get the National Party tag and you can win forever and a day" (extract from Fitzgerald Inquiry transcript, 24 November 1988). Later during the same cross-examination Russ Hinze even declared himself a convert to the cause of one vote-one value.

**Reinforcing the advantage**

The redistribution finalised in January 1986 was by far the most critical to the Nationals in terms of its potential effect. Certainly the earlier redistributions of 1971 and 1977 were important to the Country (later National) party in electorally protecting itself from a declining rural demographic base and containing any potential surge by Labor. Those redistributions also assisted the party to maintain seniority over its Liberal coalition partners in the Legislative Assembly. The stakes in the 1986 redistribution, however, were much higher. Hinging on it were the National party’s prospects of maintaining control of the Treasury benches. Only in 1983 had the Nationals realised their political dream of forming the government without relying on the Liberal party, even though their majority was not won on election results but secured as a consequence of the defections to the party, just two days after the poll, of Liberal ministers Don Lane and Brian Austin.

The National party recognised very early that the 1983 coalition crisis, coupled with the outcome of the subsequent state election, could secure a fundamental and perhaps enduring realignment of
Queensland's politics in the party's favour. The 1986 redistribution would determine the electoral framework for the first state election following the Nationals' assumption of government in their own right. The zones and boundaries to be drawn up were enormously important, therefore, both in maximising the party's prospects of retaining the majority in its own right, and in maintaining its ascendancy over the Liberals in Brisbane and the south-east corner of the state. Until 1983 the Nationals had only once held a metropolitan seat, that of Wynnum between 1974 and 1977, but in the 1983 election, as already mentioned, they outpolled the Liberals in 15 out of the 18 metropolitan seats both parties contested.

A crucial feature of the 1985 Electoral Districts Act, which provided the statutory framework for the subsequent redistribution, was an increase in the number of state electorates from 82 to 89. While the government defended this by reference to population increase, the move was condemned in the parliament by both the Liberal and Labor parties. Liberal leader Sir William Knox, for example, ridiculed the move by pointing out that if the size of the Queensland parliament had been increased over the years in response to population growth, its number of seats would have risen from 62 in 1931 to more than two hundred by 1986.

It is unclear whether the proposal put to cabinet for an increase in seats was outlined by the attorney-general, Neville Harper, or by the Transport minister, Don Lane; certainly it was not put by the premier. But it was Lane who carried most of the argument. Lane, who before joining the Nationals had had experience with redistributions as a Liberal, was one of the few members of cabinet with a strategic knowledge of how to go about the task.

The argument which Lane put to cabinet was that an increase in the size of the House was necessitated by rapid population expansion along the Gold and Sunshine Coasts, and in their respective hinterlands, as well as in the growth corridors to the north and south of the metropolitan area. Equally, Lane correctly assumed that cabinet would not agree to any decrease in representation for inland areas which were, at best, demographically stable. In cabinet's view any decrease would have struck against the National party in its own heartland and threatened to pit the
party's rural MLAs against one another for re-endorsement in a reduced complement of seats.

As Lane explained the strategy to the cabinet, the political objective in the first instance was to have a small enough quota in the south-eastern corner so that non-Labor seats in the city could be preserved and extra seats on the north and south coasts could be created to the National party's advantage. He pointed out that a smaller quota for South-Eastern zone seats would not contrast as starkly with that for seats in the adjacent Country zone where the quota is small to meet statutory requirements.

The real purpose of the 1985 seat increase proposal, then, was to protect the number of seats in the Western and Far Northern zone (where, of course, the Nationals are very strong), while at the same time taking political advantage of the population increases which had occurred in both the South-Eastern and Country zones.

By coupling the 1985-86 distribution with an increase in the number of seats, the National party benefited both ways. Although the percentage of voters living in the Western and Far Northern zone had reduced as a percentage of the total number of voters state-wide, the increase of seats in the parliament allowed the government to maintain the number of electorates in that zone. Indeed, the government, under the guise of preserving the quality of representation available to the people of that area, proceeded a step further by actually increasing both the number and proportion of electorates in that zone. In the South-Eastern zone, on the other hand, the National party could point to the changing demographic relativities between Brisbane and the near-coastal region to justify the abolition of several seats in the metropolitan area; for the same reason it justified the creation of new seats in the expanding coastal and adjacent hinterland areas where, not coincidentally, the National party had cultivated its political support. The altered balance of seats between Brisbane and non-Brisbane was justifiable, in demographic terms, if the South-Eastern zone is viewed in isolation. But it was not justifiable if the purpose of a redistribution is to reflect changing demographic relativities across the state, not just those in selected areas.

The Electoral Districts Act of 1985 is quite explicit in its loading of the electoral dice. It not only maintains and reinforces the
Zonal weightage which has been incorporated in all Queensland state redistributions since 1949, but also accentuates the degree of electoral advantage to the Nationals which is derived from that system. This is apparent from Table 1, which highlights the electoral quotas that have been set in successive redistributions for seats in the different zones.

While vote weightage in Queensland is most pronounced in the Western and Far Northern zone, it is the existence of the Country zone which is the most blatant feature of the state’s electoral system. That zone artificially cordons off the provincial city areas from their surrounding hinterlands. The effect is to contain the electoral impact of urban voters (who traditionally have favoured the ALP in provincial city areas) and maximise that of nearby non-urban voters (where the Nationals have been strong). This is notwithstanding the natural communities of interest which may exist between the two groups: non-urban voters who live close to a major centre but are electorally segregated from it commonly feel more affinity with the people of that centre than with other voters who live hundreds of kilometres away but who happen to belong to the same non-urban zone. Translated into party terms, at the 1983 election the ALP won 10 of the 13 Provincial City seats, the Nationals the other 3; the Nationals for their part were equally dominant in the Country zone, winning 13 of the 15 seats, the other 2 being held by the ALP and an Independent. At the same time, the value of votes cast in the two zones varies markedly: the average quota for a Provincial City seat, under the 1985-86 arrangements, is 18,149, while in the nearby Country zone it is 13,131.

The existence of the Country zone also appears illogical alongside the very factors which the Electoral Districts Act indicates must be given due consideration by the redistribution commissioners when allocating boundaries within zones. These include such matters as distance from the seat of government, ease of representation and community of interest. For example, ex-premier Bjelke-Petersen’s seat of Barambah, with a voting population in 1986 of less than 13,000, is in the Country zone though only two to three hours by car from Brisbane; other electorates located fifteen
hundred or more kilometres from Brisbane have voting populations of close to 20,000.

Indeed, in the zonal drawings the Queensland government has even managed, ironically, to discriminate among its own supporters. A good example is in far north Queensland, where Mulgrave and Barron River are two National party-held seats. They are not only adjacent to one another, but share a variety of economic and social characteristics. The ease of political representation is similar and their geographical sizes are roughly equivalent (Barron River is slightly larger). Yet Mulgrave is located in the Country zone, and in 1986 had 13,640 electors; Barron River, on the other hand, was placed in the Provincial Cities zone, and contained 17,069 electors.

Similar problems exist in the southern part of the state. Warwick and Fassifern are adjoining National party-held seats located between Brisbane and the New South Wales border. Both have a town and country mix. Yet Fassifern, which is significantly larger in geographical size, is in the South-Eastern zone, while Warwick is in the Country zone. Fassifern had a 1986 voting population of 21,067, and Warwick 12,314 electors at the equivalent time. Yet another illogical zonal separation involves the adjoining National-held seats of Barambah and Somerset. Both are town and farm seats fairly close to Brisbane and, until Sir Joh’s departure, were represented by the premier and deputy premier, respectively. They are roughly the same in area and economic character. There is even an added community of interest in that the major road access from Brisbane to Kingaroy (the major town in Barambah) is via the Brisbane Valley Highway which passes through the Somerset electorate. Yet in 1986 Somerset (in the South-Eastern zone) had 20,438 enrolled voters compared to 12,931 in Barambah (Country zone).

The weightage contained in the zonal arrangement was reinforced further in the 1985-86 redistribution (see Appendix C for detail). The Country zone, with 14.8 per cent of the state’s voters, was allocated 19.1 per cent of the seats, up from 14.3 per cent of the voters for 18.3 per cent of the seats at the 1977 redistribution. The Western and Far Northern zone fared even better, capturing 9 per cent of the seats with just 4.5 per cent of the state’s voters.
### TABLE 1 Queensland state electoral redistributions, 1949 to 1985

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Zones</th>
<th>Quotas for seats in each zone*</th>
<th>Number of seats per zone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>10,716</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South-Eastern (south of Mackay)</td>
<td>9,536</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>7,852</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Western</td>
<td>4,783</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>11,002</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provincial Cities</td>
<td>12,189</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>8,324</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>South-Eastern</td>
<td>13,212</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provincial Cities</td>
<td>13,170</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>10,054</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Western &amp; Far Northern</td>
<td>7,784</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>South-Eastern</td>
<td>16,368</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provincial Cities</td>
<td>15,952</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>11,515</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Western &amp; Far Northern</td>
<td>8,586</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>South-Eastern</td>
<td>19,357</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provincial Cities</td>
<td>18,149</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>13,131</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Western &amp; Far Northern</td>
<td>9,186</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A quota of electors for each zone is determined by dividing the total number of electors living in that zone by the number of electoral districts prescribed in the act for that zone. In effect, the quota for a zone represents the average number of electors in each electorate of that zone. Because of the arithmetical impossibility of arriving at seats with precisely the same voting populations, the electoral commissioners are able to determine seat boundaries within a prescribed margin (or tolerance) of the quota.

The Electoral Districts Act in fact provides for separate quotas for the different groups of Provincial Cities seats; for example, the quota for the three Townsville area seats is slightly different from the quota for the Bundaberg area seats. For the purpose of this table an average quota has been arrived at for the Provincial Cities zone as a whole.
In 1977, on the other hand, it had been allocated 8.5 per cent of the seats on the basis of 5 per cent of the voters. By contrast, the South-East’s proportion of seats was not increased in 1985-86, despite its augmented share of the state’s voters. Yet the South-East did better than the Provincial Cities zone which, unlike the Western and Far North, suffered a proportional loss of seats for a slightly reduced share of voting population.

The full political impact of the state’s system of vote weightage becomes apparent when these statistics are compared with the zonal break-down of each political party’s tally of seats won at any of the recent state elections. This clearly indicates the ALP’s strength in Brisbane and the provincial cities, and the Nationals’ dominance in the Western and Far Northern and Country zones. Over recent years the Nationals have also extended their influence in the south-east outside Brisbane, while in the rather unusual circumstances of 1983 they also made their first significant inroads into the metropolitan area, gains they consolidated at the 1986 poll. For its part, the Liberal party’s base in Queensland has traditionally been in Brisbane and the south-east and, to a much lesser extent, in the provincial cities. However, the Liberals face real difficulties in retaining that limited base, much less extending it in the north and west of the state. The results of the 1986 state election illustrating this situation are set out in Table 2.

**TABLE 2** Queensland state election 1986: first preference votes and seats won, state-wide and by zone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>ALP</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of votes</td>
<td>Seats won</td>
<td>% of votes</td>
<td>Seats won</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-Eastern</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial Cities</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western and Far North</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Leaving nothing to chance

The electoral redistribution process in Queensland is also notable in the extent to which it is dominated by the partisan interests of the government of the day. The redistribution commissioners are appointed by Governor-in-Council on the recommendation of the cabinet. Their final boundary recommendations are, moreover, submitted to the premier and become law without any reference whatsoever to either the cabinet or the parliament.

The *Electoral Districts Act* governing the redistribution specifies the total number of seats to be apportioned state-wide, the boundaries of each of the zones, and the number of seats to be allocated to each zone. While such arrangements provide the government with watertight insurance that the redistribution commissioners will make recommendations in accord with the relevant act, the commissioners have no ability to correct errors or absurdities which may be present in the legislation, and for which they themselves may attract criticism. Shortly after the 1985 *Electoral Districts Act* was passed, it returned to parliament for amendment. The entire redistribution exercise consequently was delayed by at least two months, because of a flaw in the legislative description of the South-Eastern zone boundary.

On another issue the redistribution commissioners themselves incurred direct (though mistaken) criticism following the release of the provisional boundaries in November 1985. The Wujal Wujal Aboriginal reserve had been incorporated into the Western and Far Northern zone seat of Cook, held by the ALP, even though Wujal Wujal itself is wholly located within Barron River, a Provincial City zone seat marginally held by the National party. The commissioners were required by the statute to comply with this bizarre piece of electoral cartography, which was inspired more by an interest in protecting the Nationals’ Martin Tenni in Barron River (Wujal Wujal had voted solidly for the ALP candidate at the previous state election) than it was by any "community of interest" argument relating to the effective parliamentary representation of far northern Aboriginal communities by placing them all in the one electorate.
There are other aspects about the conduct of Queensland redistributions which do not protect either the commissioners or the public. For example, although public submissions on boundaries are invited, those documents are secret unless publicly released by their sponsors. Individuals or political parties do not necessarily have access to the submissions of others, and so no assessment can be made of the extent to which the commissioners may have followed the submissions of any one group. As far back as 1971 Joh Bjelke-Petersen was on record as opposing the public release of submissions on this ground. He claimed that if the commissioners' proposals resembled too closely the submission of one party, they would be accused of bias. Moreover, the rules do not allow the commissioners to hold public hearings or to provide reasons for their boundary decisions.

This process of secrecy and limited circulation assists the Nationals, who regard redistributions as political instruments to secure the government's survival. The Queensland National party's approach to electoral law has been consistently to leave as little as possible to chance. Given such attitudes, and the high political stakes involved, it is hardly surprising that the party devoted enormous resources, and the closest possible attention, to all phases of the 1985-86 redistribution exercise.

This work did not start with the appointment of the electoral commissioners. Most of the substantial effort in setting the ground-rules (that is, determining the zonal boundaries and allocating seat numbers overall and for each zone) had to be completed for incorporation in the legislation. The commissioners, once appointed, would then be obliged to follow those prescriptions in the more limited exercise of drawing individual seat boundaries within each zone.

There was also plenty of time in which to prepare for the 1985-86 redistribution. It was common knowledge, even in 1983, that a redistribution would be held before the 1986 state poll. By mid-1984 more than one third of the state's 82 seats were either above or below the allowable tolerance, thus easily meeting the legislative requirement enabling redistribution. The possibility of a snap redistribution, if only a partial one confined to the South-Eastern zone, had in fact been raised within National party circles in 1983.
This was about the time former party president John Ahern alerted the party's Management Committee to the need for additional seats in the rapidly growing Gold and Sunshine Coasts, and in the growth corridors linking them to Brisbane. But while the party was aware of the possible electoral advantages to be gained (specifically, in a partial redistribution confined to the South-Eastern zone Brisbane would lose seats to the surrounding areas), the Nationals also realised that such an exercise could spark a damaging backlash in the crucial pre-election period. The notion was dropped before it could be seriously entertained.

During 1984 the National party organisation began establishing the ground-rules for the redistribution. It created a Redistribution Committee, a subcommittee of the party's powerful state Management Committee, to undertake this work. Members of the party, especially parliamentary members as well as zone and branch representatives, were invited to make suggestions to it. Various proposals were considered by the Redistribution Committee, including one to retain the South-Eastern zone but to split the remainder of the state along a north-south line roughly following
the Great Dividing Range. The suggestion would have entailed some risk to the party's power base, however, and given the Nationals' knife-edge parliamentary majority (43 seats out of 82), it was quickly rejected by the committee. All agreed that the existing four-zone system had served the party well and should be retained.

It was only after the Redistribution Committee had settled its position on some of these broader matters that the proposal to increase the overall size of the parliament was taken to cabinet. Little wonder, too, that the cabinet viewed this matter as a fait accompli. All ministers would have been aware of the activities of the Redistribution Committee and equally aware of the way in which its composition and work integrated both parliamentary and organisational perspectives. The working membership of that committee comprised former party president John Ahern, David Russell QC, Peter Lacey, and two cabinet ministers from the north - Vince Lester and Bob Katter Jnr. Others closely associated with or aware of the committee's work included party operative Jennifer Russell, Sir Robert Sparkes, Don Lane, Brian Austin, new MLA Mark Stoneman, and Wendy Armstrong. Armstrong, a member of the Premier's Department research staff, also served as an important liaison between the parliamentary and organisational wings of the party.

John Ahern, who lives at Conondale in the Sunshine Coast hinterland and is the father of premier Mike Ahern, played an important role in determining the number of additional seats to be created in the South-Eastern zone, as well as suggesting other possible zone boundary changes. Armstrong, who in the past had worked at party headquarters, is reported to have played an important role in revising zone boundaries across the state. Mark Stoneman, for his part, was reportedly instrumental in bringing about zone modifications which affected a number of seats between Townsville and the Whitsunday region, including his own seat of Burdekin. Jennifer Russell's role at headquarters was to sift through the boundary suggestions submitted by individual parliamentary members and others, and to discuss their ideas with them. She then contributed those suggestions, as she saw approp-
Zoning to Stay in Power

When this phase of the Redistribution Committee's work was completed, a revised Electoral Districts Bill incorporating the recommendations of the party's Redistribution Committee was prepared. It was introduced into the House in early 1985, and passed shortly thereafter. As mentioned earlier, an error forced the government to seek some amendments several months later; the problem delayed the work of the redistribution commissioners, who had commenced their task shortly after the passage of the original bill.

Choosing the commissioners

The choice of the electoral redistribution commissioners was a tricky matter and, like earlier coalition administrations, the government exercised great care in making its selections. The commissioners themselves have a very limited role. They determine electoral boundaries within each of the zones but the ground-rules upon which they operate predetermine the essential character of the electoral structure.

Among their other problems, the commissioners during the 1985-86 redistribution had to rely on an inadequate data base. In fact, it was grossly inferior to the data base the Nationals used to prepare their submissions. For example, the redistribution commission's base maps, supplied by the State Electoral Office, were badly out of date in their detail of new housing estate developments in outer suburban Brisbane and in the near coastal areas. The electoral rolls were in equally poor shape, a product in part of the longstanding inability of the Queensland and Commonwealth governments to reach agreement on joint electoral rolls.

By contrast, the National party's data provided it with a much more sophisticated basis upon which to formulate detailed boundary recommendations. It prepared its submissions with the assistance of the Justice Department's computerised data base and, in some areas, by extremely detailed booth-specific voting data. In some cases where the data base was patchy, such as new housing estates, "on the ground" assessments were made of the likely
numbers of electors residing in new developments.

It is unclear, however, whether the data obtained from the Justice Department was additional to that which was available to all MLAs. Each MLA is entitled to obtain for his or her electorate a floppy disk providing detailed roll information for that seat. MLAs are also able to request that information for adjoining seats provided they are in the same electoral zone. A program is available with these disks to enable the data to be manipulated. For example, street-specific information can be isolated. The State Electoral Office also publishes the results of each election, which includes polling-booth-specific data.

The extent to which redistribution commissioners over the years have seen themselves as fearlessly impartial agents or, alternatively, as operatives of the incumbent regime is difficult to assess. It is also not easy to judge their work in these terms, given that submissions are secret (unless their sponsors choose otherwise), proceedings are conducted in private, and no reasons for boundary decisions are provided.

In the selection of commissioners there has been a preference by successive governments for continuity in terms of the types of individuals appointed, as well as the actual people chosen. For example, the last three redistribution commissions each comprised two career public servants and one outsider; and the late Sir Douglas Fraser, a distinguished public servant, participated in four successive redistributions, three of them as chairman. Even more remarkably, though a tribute to the man’s standing, Sir Douglas managed to be appointed by both Labor (1949) and Country party-led administrations (1958, 1971, and 1977). Four of the five redistribution commissions appointed since the zonal system was instituted have included the principal electoral officer or, in the case of 1985, the departmental under secretary to whom that person reported. On one occasion (1958) the surveyor-general was appointed, while only in 1949 was a Supreme Court judge involved (as chairman). Appendix D provides details of the composition of each of the redistribution commissions since 1949.

The person chosen to head the 1985 redistribution commission was John Andrews, an engineer, economist and town planner who enjoyed great career success in the Queensland public service. He
first came to public notice in 1978 when, as deputy commissioner for Main Roads, he was appointed by the state government as temporary city administrator of the Gold Coast City Council in the wake of the council’s dismissal by Local Government minister Russ Hinze. Andrews held that difficult post until the scheduled municipal elections in March 1979, and was widely regarded as having performed well in it. His efforts were rewarded when, almost immediately, he was appointed by the state government as chairman of the Public Service Board, one of the very top public service jobs. Surprisingly though, he relinquished the post after only five months, in fact on the day of his sixtieth birthday. But he still enjoyed the government’s confidence and two years later was appointed to the plum post of Queensland agent-general in London. While in that office he was approached about becoming chairman of the state’s redistribution commission. He expressed interest in the job and, before returning to Australia in September 1984, spent some time looking at British, Canadian and American electoral systems. The redistribution job was also not the last task requested of Andrews by the government. When the redistribution was completed he became chairman of the Queensland Sugar Board.

The second member of the 1985-86 redistribution commission was another career public servant, Col Pearson. Pearson was under secretary of the Department of Justice and, as such, the permanent head to whom the State Electoral Office reported.

As already mentioned, each of the redistribution commissions since 1958 has contained, in addition to two career public officials, one member from outside the public service. In 1971 and 1977 this was Archibald (later Sir Archibald) Archer, a retired grazier and company director, and a person with appropriate geographical connections (he had a good knowledge of the west) and sound family links with the Country party. The outsider appointed to the 1985-86 redistribution commission was another Queensland knight with close conservative party connections, Sir Thomas Covacevich. Covacevich was a business man and senior partner in the Cairns legal firm Macdonnells.

Not surprisingly, Covacevich’s past association with both Sir Joh and the National party drew critical comment from the Opposition.
and segments of the media on his fitness to serve as electoral commissioner. In 1976 Covacevich had donated $100,000 for a university centre in Cairns, and the premier had announced it at a country cabinet reception there at the time. Covacevich was later knighted for his contribution to the welfare of the people of north Queensland. His appointment as electoral commissioner drew especially blunt criticism from Opposition leader Neville Warburton. He told the state parliament on 28 August 1985 that in 1979 Sir Thomas had sought funds for the National party's Bjelke-Petersen Foundation and thus was "under no circumstances a fit and appropriate person to be carrying out redistributions". According to Quentin Dempster in the Sunday Mail of 23 October 1988, at no time did Sir Thomas respond to or publicly deny the Opposition leader’s claims.

Compiling and handling the submissions

The first task of the redistribution commission (formally known as the Electoral Districts Commission) was to call for public submissions. The Liberal party prepared a document outlining a range of suggestions, as did a number of other groups and individuals. The ALP, however, lodged no submission other than a single-page letter from its state secretary, Peter Beattie, reiterating the party’s strong objections to the zonal system.

The ALP’s failure to lodge a proper submission played into the hands of the Nationals. While understandably sceptical about the framework governing the redistribution, the ALP’s decision not to make boundary suggestions meant that the commissioners would not have any proposal before them from the Nationals’ traditional opponents. Labor’s tactical mistake was also unnecessary, as David Hamill had spent several weeks preparing such a document. In fact, the decision of the ALP was probably determined more by factional distrust than by any interest in the party adopting the high ground on the issue of the zonal system.

In contrast, the Nationals paid the closest attention to the preparation of their boundary proposals. They displayed the same rigorous approach and attention to very fine points in their dealings with the Electoral Districts Commission as they had in
earlier establishing the statutory base and ground-rules under which the commissioners would be obliged to operate. Not contenting themselves with one document, they furnished the commission with separate proposals for each zone. Nothing was left to chance. Each document went into intricate detail about the boundary proposals being submitted. Each was forwarded separately upon completion, the last only reaching the commission on the closing date for submissions.

The National party’s submissions to the Electoral Districts Commission were constructed only after all members of the parliamentary party had been invited by party headquarters to lodge their suggestions for boundaries. Most took advantage of this opportunity, some by forwarding area maps indicating boundary preferences and colour-coded guidance regarding the known pockets of support for each of the parties in the relevant areas. Other members simply went up to the party’s Spring Hill headquarters at Bjelke-Petersen House and discussed their ideas with Jennifer Russell, who played a key role in this phase of proceedings.

The Nationals have a strong base in both the Western and Far Northern and Country zones. The party thus had no difficulty in drawing upon expert local advice to assist in the formulation of preferred boundaries in those regions. There was also little pressure on individual MLAs holding seats in those areas since the zonal structure governing the redistribution not only guaranteed, but also increased, the seat numbers in both zones. The Nationals were similarly strong in the Gold and Sunshine Coast areas, and it is thus not surprising that the party’s submission for the South-Eastern zone outside Brisbane relied heavily on the advice of local MLAs and branch and party officials, including John Ahern and state senior vice-president Charlie (later Sir Charles) Holm. The material submitted from these various sources was also supplemented by computer analysis incorporating updated demographic data, which was vital to the drafting of boundary proposals in these expanding areas.

Although the revised zonal structure meant that, in strict arithmetical terms, the Nationals could almost retain office in their own right without any metropolitan seats, the party was under-
standably desperate not to forfeit the significant foothold it had gained in Brisbane in 1983. Given that the Nationals’ metropolitan base was still only in its infancy, and bearing in mind that the party’s parliamentary representation in Brisbane was half comprised of ex-Liberal MLAs, much of the detailed boundary work for metropolitan seats was handled by ex-Liberals, in particular Don Lane and Brian Austin and, to a lesser extent, Bob Moore. Moore joined the Nationals in early 1983 after he was disendorsed as the Liberal candidate for the seat of Windsor, which he had represented since 1969.

The detailed work of Don Lane and Brian Austin was very significant in determining the party’s preferred Brisbane boundaries, although other sitting National members from metropolitan seats were also consulted. While it was logical for campaigners with a good local knowledge, like Austin and Lane, to carry out much of this work, there was a risk to the party in allowing the two men carte blanche. Both held tricky seats, and both could expect difficulties because of the timing and circumstances of their defections in 1983. Austin as a Liberal had held his seat of Wavell that year only by a narrow margin in a two-way contest with ALP candidate Chris Begley. Lane had survived a tight three-corner struggle in Merthyr. The dilemma now facing the Nationals in redrawing the Brisbane boundaries was that while there was an obligation to assist Lane and Austin, the party could not afford to protect them at the cost of its ambitions of consolidating a broad metropolitan base.

Demographic changes within the South-Eastern zone since the 1977 redistribution meant that, in net terms, Brisbane would lose two seats. On the other hand, the non-Brisbane area within the south-east would gain six seats, a net increase of four seats for the zone (bringing its seat tally from 47 to 51).

The reduction in Brisbane seats, coupled with demographic shifts within the metropolitan area, made it necessary to abolish at least one of Brisbane’s inner western or northern seats. Initial planning within National party ranks was to eliminate the seat of Windsor, won from the non-Labor parties by ALP candidate Pat Comben in 1983. A number of boundary realignments involving northern and western suburbs were then crafted on this basis. An alternative
suggestion was to abolish the seat of Nundah, held for the Liberal party by Sir William Knox. This idea was discarded, however, when the Nationals realised that the plan would threaten the adjoining seats of Merthyr and Wavell, held by Lane and Austin, respectively. Party headquarters, probably in concert with Lane and Austin, then experienced a change of heart regarding the strategy for dealing with the boundary problems on Brisbane’s northside. This switch was presumably prompted by the realisation that no juggling of Brisbane’s northern and western suburbs could readily save both Brian Austin and Don Lane. The Nationals wanted to protect both men: they were two of the government’s senior ministers, and both were regarded as competent. The party also owed them a debt for their change of party colours in 1983. It was agreed that one of their seats, probably Wavell, should be abolished and a suitable seat for its incumbent found elsewhere.

Bob Moore, who had assisted in drawing the Brisbane boundaries, played a key role in drafting proposals for the three Townsville seats and for the coastal belt stretching from Townsville to Cairns. Again local members were consulted, though Labor’s strong provincial city base meant that the local databank available to the Nationals was not as complete as in those other parts of the state where their base was strong. One of the major arguments within the National party over boundaries in the north Queensland coastal belt centred upon what MLAs termed the “manageability” of individual electorates. Some National parliamentarians proposed revised boundaries which they felt would produce more manageable electorates in terms of the ease of representation. This argument was relevant, for example, in discussions about Barron River and a new seat of Tablelands, originally touted within the party as the new seat of Mareeba. Not surprisingly, however, party headquarters intervened to insist that seat safety prevailed as a criterion over seat manageability.

Given the rugged style of politics of Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen and the Nationals, it is curious that during this period when submissions were being prepared there was unofficial communication between certain National party officials and certain parliamentary members of the ALP Opposition. Whether contact also extended to Liberal members is not known. The dialogue appears to have
been inspired in one or two cases by the genuine interest of some National MLAs in gauging the reaction of certain Opposition parliamentarians to particular proposals. In other instances the motives for making contact were more obscure, though one possible explanation was the mischievous interest of some Nationals in ALP factional politics. There was also the mutual interest of the Nationals and the ALP in getting rid of the Liberal party altogether. The bonds of parliamentary mateship and perhaps even those of Freemasonry also should not be discounted as possible contributing factors motivating such discussion.

The outcome

As chairman of the redistribution commission John Andrews was extremely sensitive to suggestions that his role was limited. But as this analysis has already shown, his hands were largely tied by the rules governing the process. But it was Andrews's own statements at a media briefing which embarrassed the state government and further elevated the zonal electoral system as a major public issue. He had convened the meeting in his office on 4 November 1985 for the purpose of releasing the commission's preliminary findings. Responding to a reporter who had questioned what appeared on the electoral map as a small blue island in north Queensland, Andrews said:

That's the Aboriginal reserve of Wujal Wujal that got quite a special mention in the Act. The reasons for it don't concern me as an electoral commissioner. All I know is that I don't count the numbers in this [Provincial Cities] zone. I count them in that [Western and Far Northern] zone.

Later in the same media briefing Andrews clashed with Gary Hardgrave, then a reporter with the Channel 7 current affairs show State Affair:

Hardgrave: There's going to be criticism from this time on that the gerrymander still exists.

Andrews: Yeah, but look. As far as I'm concerned I follow the Act. The criticism can rage on as much as it likes but it doesn't alter one iota the commission I have. My commission is under
the Act and as far as the law is concerned, I'm stopping with it. We'll finish it there.

It is hardly surprising that, given the rules governing the process, there is suspicion that the boundaries recommended by the commissioners are identical to the proposals lodged by the National party. While such a view overstates the case, the boundary recommendations have nearly always conformed to the general thinking of the Nationals, even if not their detailed prescriptions. Such an impression has also been confirmed by several individuals closely associated with the redistribution process, one of whom explained to the writer that to assume the system was "supposed to be fair" was to miss the point: the only game in town was to remain in office indefinitely.

Electoral commissioners in Queensland are in an impossible position. The legislation under which they operate limits their options, while they themselves are not permitted to explain their boundary decisions. Their cartographic activity, limited by the pre-determined zonal boundaries and by National party influences, often attracts strong criticism. The provisional boundaries released by the commissioners in November 1985 included, for example, a controversial proposal involving the western seats of Warrego and Balonne. This proposal from the Nationals involved the removal of the Labor town of Cunnamulla from the marginal National party seat of Warrego to the adjoining and much safer National-held seat of Balonne. Quickly dubbed by the media the Cunnamulla Nipple, which cartographically the boundary around Cunnamulla resembled, the effect of the proposed change was to make Warrego a much safer seat for the government. But the proposal was condemned by many locals on the grounds that it isolated Cunnamulla from its environs. As a result of the public outcry the commissioners, in their final recommendations several months later, amended the boundaries in the region in a way which largely overcame these concerns. In doing so, Cunnamulla stayed in Warrego and the seat remained a marginal one for the Nationals.

Similar criticism greeted the commissioners' provisional boundary recommendations involving the Sunshine Coast electorate of Landsborough. The redrawn Landsborough boundary snaked
around some beachfront real estate at Caloundra, in a shape which was likened to a parson's nose. Significantly, this unusual boundary incorporated within the Landsborough electorate the home of sitting National party member and future premier, Mike Ahern. The commissioners, once again reacting to objections, slightly broadened the shape of the parson's nose in their final maps.

Despite these relatively minor irritations and embarrassments, the Nationals had reason to be satisfied with the outcome of the redistribution. A detailed computer analysis of the 1985 redistribution revealed that, should Queensland voters reproduce their 1983 voting behaviour in 1986, the National party could expect to capture at least 50 seats (on the basis of the 38.9 per cent vote for them in 1983) in the newly enlarged 89-member parliament. (The calculations were made by entering the results recorded in all 1689 booths spread among the 82 electorates at the 1983 Queensland state election. All those booths were precisely located on maps and then, when the provisional redistribution was announced in November 1985, they were reallocated amongst the 89 newly-arranged seats. A similar exercise was conducted when the final or determined boundaries were released in late January 1986.) As it happened, the Nationals won the 1986 state election by collecting 49 seats with 39.6 per cent of the primary vote.

Reinforcing the electoral advantage

Although explained on the basis of preserving rural representation, Premier Hanlon's real motive for introducing the zonal system in 1949 was to protect his government's hide. Yet his action was to prove doubly ironic, not only because the zonal arrangement, following Labor's split, was able to be reformulated to keep them out of power, but also because Hanlon himself came from Brisbane. His predecessors who had maintained Labor's commitment to one vote-one value, on the other hand, had all represented rural seats.

It suited the Country (later National) party to maintain the zone-based structure, and the party reinforced the advantage by creating a zone comprised of coastal farmland districts. This initiative was inconsistent with the National party's own "community of interest"
arguments in favour of vote weightage, but this was irrelevant to them. The real intention behind the arrangement was to ensure that support for the Labor and Liberal parties was geographically compartmentalised, and thus politically contained. The National party could then be sure that in any general election it would have a kick-start advantage over its opponents.
Loaded though the electoral dice has been in Queensland, it should not be concluded that Labor has been unfairly denied government. On only one occasion since 1958 has the ALP's primary vote exceeded the combined tally of the Liberals and Nationals. This was in 1972. The Nationals have been much more fortunate. They won seniority status within the state's coalition on as few as 20 per cent of the votes, and office in their own right on just 38.9 per cent. Appendix E details the results of all state elections since the introduction of the zonal system in 1949.

The National party has steadfastly resisted any suggestion that it has rorted the electoral system. But the case of Wujal Wujal alone is a glaring example of a boundary gerrymander which has been legislatively imposed.

The extent of the National party's involvement in Queensland's electoral arrangements has been clearly shown in the conduct of the 1985-86 redistribution. Public confidence in the integrity of the state's electoral arrangements was also severely undermined by evidence before the Fitzgerald Inquiry in 1988. Russ Hinze told the inquiry of "rigged" electoral boundaries; corrupt ex-police officer Jack Herbert gave evidence of improper practices regarding the management of electoral rolls; and several ex-ministers made statements about how state cabinet seemed to be aware of the alleged voting behaviour of a Supreme Court judge. Just as remarkably, Queensland's suspended police commissioner, Sir Terence Lewis, attempted to explain to the inquiry how it was necessary for him, in the exercise of his police duties, to raise electoral matters (including redistributions) in discussions with the premier, other ministers and National party identity Sir Edward Lyons. The relevance of such matters to the police commissioner's sphere of responsibility has yet to be established satisfactorily.

The maintenance of Queensland's zonal electoral structure is crucial to the National party's future. Little wonder that the state government was prepared to invest significant public funds in a government advertising campaign to convince Queenslanders not to support the 1988 constitutional referendum proposal dealing with fair elections. And while the National party government sought to portray that proposal as one in which a gun was being held to the heads of Queenslanders, the reality was that the proposal threatened the survival of the Nationals' regime.
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For many years Queensland's electoral structure has provided the state government with a buffer against the possibility of political defeat. This situation has been understood by those working within or close to the political system and, in the process, a view has been engendered of the relative invulnerability of the position of the ruling party (or parties). The effect, in practice, was to reinforce longstanding values about what are supposedly the important elements in Queensland politics. It also underlined the already longheld disregard for the fate of those institutions, such as the parliament, public service, the police force, and the judiciary, whose role it is to ensure that government operates with a measure of efficiency, accountability and regard for the public interest. The parliament has failed to bring the government to account; the public service has been politicised; and the police force has been used not so much to uphold the law, but as an active arm of government. Even the state's judiciary has shown itself vulnerable to political interference. These institutional structures have been regarded by successive governments as impediments to progress and development, so it is perhaps not surprising that governments have sometimes sought to neutralise their effect.

A lame parliament

Party and government dominance of parliament is a common feature of Westminster-derived systems, and one which has led to widespread questioning of parliament's capacity to ensure that the government remains accountable to it. This ability to secure accountability is the very essence of responsible government and one of the central functions of a modern parliament. Over the years, however, parliament's influence has been eroded by the
steadily increasing authority of cabinet, the imposition of tight party discipline, and cabinet’s reliance upon the expertise of permanent public officials working in an increasingly complex administrative environment.

Whereas in the past generation there have been a number of significant attempts elsewhere in Australia to rejuvenate the authority and independence of the parliament, the Bjelke-Petersen government was impervious to any suggestion that the role of Queensland’s legislature might deserve reconsideration. In a sense this was not surprising, given that Queensland’s political leaders, as a rule, had never felt obliged to acknowledge, much less follow, trends emerging elsewhere in the country. It is worthwhile recalling, for example, that in 1983 the Queensland Nationals were prepared to push the relationship with their Liberal coalition partners to the political brink in preference to making the least concession on what was a modest proposal for parliamentary reform, namely, establishing a parliamentary public accounts committee.

On no account could it be reasonably argued that the Bjelke-Petersen government’s lack of interest in parliamentary reform was based upon the assurance that the Queensland parliament possessed the authority to bring an incumbent government to account for its activities. Rather, the reverse was the case. There were, and remain, numerous aspects of the parliament’s procedures and practices where the role of the Opposition and backbench to scrutinise individual ministers, the cabinet collectively, and the government’s administration, is not safeguarded. To a large extent such scrutiny probably has not even been acknowledged as legitimate activity.

The blame for this situation cannot be levelled entirely at the Bjelke-Petersen period. The authority of the parliamentary institution in Queensland had withered long before his premiership. Certainly it is the case that parliament in this state once enjoyed, like its English parent, a "golden age", in the sense that, during the first fifty years following Separation, political life was centred on the parliamentary arena. That was before the political parties were fully established, however, and at a time when ministries fluctuated with changing political and parliamentary
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loyalties. It was also a period when the scope of government activities was sufficiently limited that ministers were relatively well placed to control their departments at a detailed level. Yet there is no evidence to suggest that parliament in Queensland at that time was a more relevant institution because of any substantive understanding of or commitment by the state’s politicians to the Westminster principles of responsible government.

The erosion of parliament’s authority in Queensland has been hastened over the years by several indigenous factors, among them the abolition of the state’s Legislative Council in 1922. The record of Australian state upper houses, as chambers of legislative and administrative review, is not creditable; for the most part, they have failed to assume their "review" responsibilities, except in those almost predictable circumstances where an upper house has been dominated by a political grouping other than that controlling the lower chamber. In such terms Queensland may well have done the right thing in abolishing its second chamber.

Yet the absence itself of the Legislative Council has had a discernible influence upon the character of government in Queensland. Sole responsibility for the construction and scrutiny of legislation has rested with the Legislative Assembly. This implies a need for the Assembly to have developed the resources, talent, capacities and functions which are shared, at least notionally, under a bicameral (two-House) system in the other Australian states. This additional burden on the Legislative Assembly has never been acknowledged. Also, the absence of the second chamber, combined with the entrenching of the party system since the early twentieth century, has worked against the development in Queensland of any notion of political compromise, in particular, any sense that there were limitations to the authority of parliament or government.

Queensland’s raw political style also has influenced very significantly the shaping of parliament’s role, and especially the relationships between the executive and the legislature. For most of this century Queensland politics have been dominated by long periods of stable and unbroken rule, and by a series of strong, often authoritarian, political leaders. A tradition has developed whereby Queensland’s political life has been, and remains,
dominated by party leadership and the cult of personality. As a result, the parliament has not developed as a focus of political authority except in those unusual circumstances where a complete party break-down has occurred, such as at the time of the ALP's split in 1957.

The Queensland parliament was therefore a downgraded institution long before Joh Bjelke-Petersen arrived at political centre-stage. In turn, Bjelke-Petersen's own early experiences as a politician had an enduring impact on his perspectives of political leadership and the roles of parliament and cabinet. He sampled ten years of tough political life as an Opposition backbencher before Labor's collapse in 1957 - ten years which illustrated to him the enormous difficulties of overcoming a government tightly in control of its parliamentary party room; he also perceived the advantages for a government which worked closely with its public service and minimally through the parliament. Above all, Bjelke-Petersen's pre-1958 experience showed him the benefits to a government of curtailing as far as possible the parliamentary opportunities for political attack by the Opposition.

Bjelke-Petersen's first two years' experience as premier were also significant in shaping his later behaviour. The difficulties he encountered then impressed on him the overriding importance of cultivating and maintaining absolute personal and party loyalty and solidarity within his own parliamentary party and ministry. As explained below, his determination to ensure loyalty led to some rather novel interpretations of the Westminster-derived model of government, and also to a variety of practices which sit uncomfortably alongside more conventional understandings of the notion of ministerial responsibility.

Queensland cannot claim a monopoly on such reformulations or misrepresentations of Westminster-derived principles, yet it is distinguishable for the extent to which wayward interpretations have been actively incorporated within the parliamentary and government apparatus. A good example has been the long-term blurring of the roles of parliament and government. Prior to Mike Ahern's premiership the Nationals in government had also demonstrated a total lack of concern for the fate of the parliamentary institution. For example, the Queensland parliament's own
Standing Orders Committee, the body responsible for the parliament’s procedures, did not meet between 1950 and 1980. This gives an indication of the extent to which concern about the adequacy of parliamentary procedures simply did not register on the political barometer. It suggests that the parliamentarians themselves either did not perceive that the role of the legislature was a changing one, or were uninterested in it. It was not until a scandal in the late 1970s over the alleged misuse by parliamentarians of air-travel vouchers, coupled with increasingly vocal criticisms of parliament’s performance by a retiring Speaker, that the Liberal and Labor parties raised the performance of the parliament as a political issue.

This failure to update standing orders led to some interesting anachronisms. One example is that, to this day, no change has been made to the provision for a parliamentary quorum, that is, the number of members necessary to be present for debate in the House. In the late 1940s state parliament comprised sixty-two MLAs, with the quorum set at sixteen members, plus the Speaker. This figure has remained unchanged ever since, despite the four increases in the size of the parliament which have occurred since that time. The present quorum represents only about 18 per cent of the House’s full complement of eighty-nine: so serious is this situation that the ministry alone, even with one or two of its members absent, has sufficient numbers to constitute a quorum.

The difficulties associated with outdated standing orders have not been assisted at various times by the rulings of the Speaker, nor with the interpretation of the role of that office by some of its incumbents. As tends to occur in other parliaments, the effectiveness of Question Time is restricted by the Speaker’s limited authority to ensure some relationship between the questions asked and the answers provided. Changes to Question Time introduced in 1983 following a report from the Standing Orders Committee the previous year provided the Speaker with the discretion to curtail unduly long ministerial answers, and to insist that those answers be relevant. This discretion has rarely been exercised. As in many parliaments, Question Time continues to be consumed by extremely routine exchanges, lengthy answers
to "Dorothy Dixers", and the reading of answers which become, in effect, ministerial statements.

Questions without notice - a device intended to obtain on the spot accountability from ministers - have been permitted under sessional order since August 1970 and via standing orders since April 1983. Sometimes, however, ministers decline to answer such questions, insisting instead that they be placed on notice before they are answered. Such questions therefore cease to be questions without notice. In this further way ministers are able to undermine Question Time by reading prepared answers which may be lengthy and therefore time-consuming.

These practices serve collectively to curtail severely the effectiveness of the important institutional role which Question Time should fulfil in securing a measure of government accountability. The 1983 standing order adjustments to Question Time, if enforced by the Speaker, might assist that process, and many routine matters could be handled by written, rather than verbal, questions and answers. Unfortunately for the parliamentary process itself, most recent Speakers have either been unwilling or unable to exercise discretion, except in those cases where it has assisted the government's partisan position.

The ministerial statement is another vehicle whereby ministers are traditionally held accountable in parliament, though the effectiveness of this process is influenced in Queensland, as elsewhere, by the usual party political factors. Until 1983 parliamentary procedures did not allow a right of reply to ministerial statements by either the Opposition or the backbench. The rather unfortunate effect of this practice was demonstrated in April 1980 when Premier Bjelke-Petersen, in making a ministerial statement on the subject of the then Commonwealth Royal Commission into Drugs, heavily criticised Ed Casey, the leader of the Opposition. Casey, however, had no formal right of reply to the premier's allegations. The new standing order, No. 108A, potentially addresses this problem by allowing a minister concluding a statement to trigger procedurally an opportunity for the Opposition leader or nominee to respond on an equal-time basis. Yet that right of reply is still discretionary, and in most cases ministers do not make available the opportunity for an Opposition response. Even when
it is provided, the Speaker has the authority to insist that such a reply be scheduled at a later point in the sittings if, in the Speaker's view, an immediate response would interrupt the business of the House.

The position of leader of the Opposition is, institutionally, an important one in a parliamentary system. Yet in Queensland it has virtually no parliamentary privileges accorded to it, which suggests some reluctance or inability on the part of government to recognise the legitimacy of the role of political opposition. The staff resources provided by parliament to the leader of the Opposition are confined to a private secretary, a press secretary, four clerk-typists and a chauffeur (who in practice doubles as a general assistant). The deputy leader of the Opposition has the services of a research officer.

The government, by contrast, is supported in parliament by eighteen individual ministerial staff teams, as well as by the considerable resources of the state's public service. In 1979 the Opposition leader and his staff secured improved accommodation facilities in the parliamentary complex, but for a period prior to this they had been required by a directive from the government to occupy office premises about a kilometre and a half away from Parliament House. The office and meeting facilities available to the Opposition remain meagre compared to those at the disposal of the government. Interestingly, too, the 1979 decision to upgrade the Opposition's resources was taken by the Liberal parliamentary leader (as acting premier), in consultation with the parliamentary chairman of committees, at a time when Joh Bjelke-Petersen was out of the state on business. It is reported that, when notified of the matter, the premier was extremely angry at this concession to his political opponents. There was nothing he could do about it, however, given that the decision already had been formally authorised for implementation by the Speaker, Jim Houghton, as his final act prior to his retirement from parliament.

The creation of permanent parliamentary committees of a policy or investigatory nature is generally regarded as likely to assist the rejuvenation of parliament's authority by holding governments to account. Developments of this nature at the federal level are well known, and a number also have occurred in other states.
Queensland, on the other hand, there are still no permanent parliamentary committees of a policy character. Before 1988 the explanation was simple: Joh Bjelke-Petersen did not like committees. To him they got in the way of the business of government. Above all, committees with a capacity to scrutinise the policies or administration of the government were portrayed as representing an unnecessary threat to Queensland’s political stability. That so-called stability, however, was nothing more than an institutionalised assumption that there should be no limitations on the government’s powers. The prospect of a public accounts committee was evidently especially "unnecessary" and threatening - the issue caused the collapse of the state’s coalition in 1983. Indeed, not even the later jailing of Allen and Judith Callaghan for misusing public funds weakened Sir Joh’s opposition to the idea. And it was not until Mike Ahern assumed the premiership that the government - by this time also reeling from revelations made before the Fitzgerald Inquiry - moved to establish one.

The long-time absence of a public accounts committee assisted the cultivation of an environment in which virtually no thought was given to the principle of ministers, parliamentarians or officials differentiating public duty from private interest. This has led, in turn, to a situation well-documented in evidence before the Fitzgerald Inquiry, in which the public purse has come to be regarded as a facility for the government and its friends. Little wonder there was no interest in establishing checks on behaviour through parliamentary public accounts or public works committees.

Of the parliamentary committees which do exist, there is little recognition of their potentially onerous workloads. The Subordinate Legislation Committee is a good example. Like other parliamentary committees it has representation from both sides of the House. Its functions are to oversee the review of all regulations, rules, by-laws, ordinances, orders-in-council, and proclamations which are tabled in parliament. In any year there may be hundreds of these. Yet the Subordinate Legislation Committee under present arrangements shares, with the Privileges Committee, the support services of just two clerks (and a clerk-typist). Not surprisingly, those individuals tend to spend their time collating documentation and incorporating alterations rather than perform-
ing the more active review and scrutiny tasks which otherwise might be expected of a parliamentary committee’s support staff.

There are also no parliamentary committees in Queensland that deal with estimates of departmental and other expenditure. These estimates are considered by the House as a whole. Because of the magnitude of this task and the limited time available for that scrutiny within the parliamentary calendar, the practice has developed whereby only between five and eight of the eighteen ministries have their estimates examined by parliament in any one year. Even fewer, perhaps two or three, tend to be dealt with in an election year. While the general expectation is that estimates debates will be rotated among the various portfolios, it is interesting to note that it is not the parliament, but the cabinet, which decides which ministries will be examined by the legislature in any one year. Even when portfolios are selected for scrutiny, larger or more important ministries may include a number of departments or sub-departments, so the consideration of all the portfolios’s estimates is compressed into the allotted time. Furthermore, certain portfolios have tended to be debated more frequently than others. The estimates of the treasurer’s own portfolio are never discussed, and the premier’s portfolio was not debated during Sir Joh’s last eight years in office. Yet the Works and Housing portfolio was dealt with on three occasions over the same period.

There were several explanations for this, including Sir Joh’s uneasiness over such scrutiny, and the considerable pork-barrelling opportunities available to governments in matters concerning Works and Housing, or Mines and Energy (the latter portfolio has tended to be debated every second year over the last decade). In other words, the accountability process to parliament was not recognised as such, but was seen only in terms of associated political risks or opportunities.

None the less, the procedures for considering legislation in the Queensland parliament have undergone a modest improvement over recent years. For example, there are wider opportunities for adjournment and urgency debates and, at long last, procedures have been modified to dispense with debate at the First Reading stage of legislation. Up until 1979 the practice had been to debate
at the First Reading stage the principles of bills which at that point were not printed, and thus to which members of parliament (apart from cabinet members) were unlikely to be privy.

A major weakness of present procedures for considering legislation relates to the means of examining detailed provisions within legislation. Committee-stage proceedings, as presently conducted, are really no different from Second or Third Reading debates. The House sits in the committee stage as a committee of the whole (that is, all MLAs may be present), and in most cases the so-called "committee stage" debate tends to be generalised rather than specific.

During the days of coalition government there were several well-publicised instances of parliament’s failure adequately to consider or explore the details and consequences of legislation, for example, the *Justices Act Amendment Act of 1979*, and the *Criminal Law Amendment Act 1979*. Both were important pieces of legislation in the government’s handling of political events at the time. There were, however, only relatively few occasions during the coalition period from 1957 to 1983 when the cabinet lost control of parliamentary debate on a matter of its own legislative initiative. One instance occurred in 1979, when some forty amendments, mostly sponsored by the Liberal backbench, were made to the Firearms and Offensive Weapons Bill. There were even fewer occasions when the actions of cabinet were subject to censure motions in parliament from the government’s own backbench, although one such motion was pursued in the wake of the unexpected night-time demolition of the Belle Vue Hotel opposite Parliament House. The Belle Vue had been the subject of a wrangle between those groups which wanted, for heritage reasons, to save it and the state government, which had development plans for the site.

Without its coalition partners after 1983, however, the National party government encountered considerable difficulty in the parliament. The government’s preferred style of "strong" and "determined" leadership did not always adapt well to the parliamentary arena, and there were numerous instances, mostly during Bjelke-Petersen’s time, when the government’s almost hortatory approach to the drafting of legislation, such as that dealing with
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industrial relations, came unstuck. It was not uncommon for important legislation which had originally been steamrolled through the House in unseemly haste, to be returned for amendment shortly afterwards; the reason was often sloppy drafting or because the government had refused either to accept amendments or to allow a reasonable time for legislative gestation. The Electoral Districts Act of 1985 is a case in point.

The state government periodically defended the parliament's performance by claiming, quite correctly, that over the years the Queensland parliament had averaged at least as many sitting days per year as any of its Lower House counterparts at the state level in Australia (see Appendix F). But this defence missed the point, as sitting days alone provide little indication of the quality or relevance of parliamentary proceedings. A much more valid observation relates to the length of parliamentary recesses, those periods in which there is no scrutiny by the legislature of the executive's activities. The Queensland parliament sat for only four days between 30 March and 22 November in 1983, yet it was during that period that the state's coalition government crumbled. The problem with long periods of parliamentary recess is essentially that in these periods ministers are not readily accountable for their actions, except to their party colleagues. There is also no guarantee that, when parliament resumes, issues dealt with by the government during the parliamentary recess will be subject to the House's scrutiny or even be reported there.

It is possible for parliament to be recalled in extraordinary session, but this happens at the behest of the government requesting the Speaker. The conditions necessary for the extraordinary recall of parliament are dictated, as elsewhere, by the party political considerations of the day. The Queensland government was much more favourably disposed to consider recalling parliament over the perceived need for essential services legislation or the related anti-power union measures than it was over the controversial decision to locate the state's next power station at Tarong or the 1986 arts funding crisis which led to the criminal convictions of the Callaghans. In the first case the government probably considered its own position at one with apparent public hostility toward the strike-prone electricity industry. With Tarong,
on the other hand, the strategy was to by-pass the Legislative Assembly, or at least to deny parliament most (if not all) of its opportunity to comment upon the issue until after the decision was sealed. As for the arts funding crisis, the clear strategy of the government was to keep it out of the parliament by asserting that the matters were being handled by the courts, and were thus sub judice. This respectful approach to the courts may have been appropriate, but it was also very convenient. It was, moreover, an approach somewhat at odds with the government’s more carefree attitude to the rights of individuals, or to matters under investigation, when its political opponents were involved. For example, on 6 March 1984 the then Transport minister, Don Lane, used the opportunity provided by a question without notice on an unrelated matter (the Interstate Commission) in order to name High Court judge and former federal Labor attorney-general Lionel Murphy as the judge involved in the so-called Age tapes. This was despite the fact that, at the time, the authenticity of the tapes had not been established.

Accountability to whom? Confusing the roles of government and parliament

The appallingly lame condition of the Queensland parliament in terms of its ability to secure accountability is not entirely surprising, given that the state’s politics have long been dominated by notions of strong personal and party leadership. Moreover, throughout this century the parliament has been regarded as having no role other than that of legitimating government activity. One of the effects of this has been to institutionalise a number of fundamental misunderstandings about the roles and functions of parliament and about concepts such as ministerial responsibility. Procedures for the consideration of government legislation, as discussed below, provide a good example.

Party factors obviously have a role to play, as they do elsewhere, yet the parliament’s role in considering legislation is so delayed and so diminished in Queensland that an assumption seems to have arisen that the obstacles to legislative passage will derive only from the government side of the House. This not only denies the
legitimate role traditionally accorded the Opposition, but also
suggests that the party room has become the de facto parliament.
During his premiership Joh Bjelke-Petersen's own notions about
the government's accountability actively contributed to the
prevailing confusion and misunderstanding in Queensland regard­
ing the respective roles of parliament and government. His strong
religious views seemed to flavour his behaviour in this regard, as
reflected by his comments in an interview with the Bulletin on 8
October 1977: "Surely if you're elected to govern you should know
what's correct or right without having to ask somebody's advice."
He also once put the view to parliament that governments have a
responsibility to protect people from themselves (Queensland
When considered in conjunction with his Lutheran fundamen­
talist views, statements such as these indicated that Joh Bjelke-
Petersen preferred to consider himself accountable not to the
people, or even the parliament, but to a higher and externally-
 imposed authority - God, the Bible, and his own strong sense of
morality. Yet to rely on the apparent integrity of one person in
government is risky in the extreme. Political systems need
structures of accountability, not the word of a demigod. And as
the Fitzgerald Inquiry has revealed, no matter how much political
leaders have claimed to be moral, the absence of public scrutiny
in Queensland allowed a seething bed of corruption to operate
unchecked.
In their behaviour certain of Joh Bjelke-Petersen's ministers also
displayed equally idiosyncratic confusions regarding the respective
roles accorded parliament and government. One minister, also the
proud father of a GPS student, hosted a tour of the Queensland
parliament by his child's class. While visiting the Legislative
Assembly, one student mentioned this confusion of the roles of
parliament and government by pointing out the inscription which
appeared on the Mace. (The Mace is the symbol of royal
authority and of the authority of a lower house of parliament in a
Westminster-derived system. The Mace in question had been
presented to the Queensland parliament several years before this
incident.) The student asked the minister why the Mace was
inscribed "Presented to the Government of Queensland" rather
than "Presented to the Parliament of Queensland". The minister’s reply was breathtaking: "What’s the bloody difference anyway?"

Bjelke-Petersen’s successor, Mike Ahern, had a longstanding interest as a parliamentarian in addressing issues of accountability, a commitment made more urgent once he was in office by the extent of institutional break-down revealed before the Fitzgerald Inquiry. Ahern must be credited with pushing for the establishment of a parliamentary public accounts committee, despite significant "old guard" resistance within his party. Yet even he was unprepared, in spite of the lessons of Fitzgerald, to acknowledge fully parliament’s role in securing ministerial accountability. In late 1988 he issued a set of revised guidelines for ministerial conduct and accountability, in the wake of the evidence to the Fitzgerald Inquiry given by former Transport minister Don Lane. For Queensland, which prior to Ahern’s premiership had no such rules, this initiative was pathfinding. To some extent, however, Ahern squandered the opportunity by insisting that, in terms of the guidelines, ministers were to be accountable to him and not the parliament. Although this requirement to report to the premier was consistent with procedures introduced in some other states, Ahern might have gone further by immediately requiring ministers to report details of their business and other interests to parliament. From the outset he had indicated that a feature of his premiership would be the strong emphasis placed on public accountability and on restoring the community’s faith in the state’s political institutions. Here was an obvious opportunity to underline that commitment, particularly given Lane’s admission that he had been a tax cheat and had corruptly handled his ministerial expenses.

The institutionalised misconceptions in Queensland about the roles of government and parliament have contributed significantly to the malaise of the parliament’s position. Significant ambiguity even surrounds the status of several officials who either are deemed permanent parliamentary officers or who report directly to the parliament. The Queensland Parliamentary Handbook lists the parliamentary counsel as a permanent parliamentary officer. At the same time, the Queensland Government Directory shows the position under the Premier’s Department, despite the fact that
the parliamentary counsel is required to assist the Opposition as well as the government in the preparation of legislation.

Until the mid 1980s the position of auditor-general was equally ambiguous in terms of its locus. The auditor-general presents his or her reports directly to parliament, and under the Financial Administration and Audit Act may only be removed from office by the state governor upon the consent of parliament. However, until 1984-85 the position of auditor-general was placed under the umbrella of the Premier’s Department, and not that of the parliament, in the Queensland Government Directory.

While the post of Speaker was a powerful one in nineteenth-century Queensland politics, the status of the position has declined in the twentieth century as party influences upon parliamentary life have become stronger. As in many other parliaments, election to the Speakership in Queensland has not often led to later elevation to ministerial rank. But the job has always been considered a "prize" for the governing party to bestow on one of its members. The Speakership has never developed any strong tradition of parliamentary neutrality in Queensland, though this is by no means unusual in the Australian experience. During the Labor party’s years in government in Queensland, for example, the Speaker usually attended parliamentary caucus meetings. There were even instances during the Labor years when Speakers were known to pass notes to the ministry suggesting ways in which the standing orders might be best utilised in order to blunt the Opposition’s attack.

The weakening of the Speaker’s post was hastened in at least two ways during Joh Bjelke-Petersen’s term as premier. In the first place Bjelke-Petersen himself recognised the partisan yet fragile nature of the Speakership and the necessity for its occupant to retain the confidence both of the government and the House in order to be renominated for the position and thus usually re-elected to it. On one occasion in 1972, early in the Bjelke-Petersen premiership, the Country party backbench actually rejected their leader’s choice of speaker, instead supporting Bill Lonergan, who was elected. Ironically the premier’s choice, Jim Houghton, who secured the post in 1974, later became a strong advocate for the rejuvenation of parliament’s role, and was
extremely critical of the government's attitude toward the legislature. In more recent years, however, Speakers usually have made little effort to disguise their partisanship or else have yielded to their circumstances by altering rulings in the face of Sir Joh's openly displayed hostility.

The Speaker's office was also weakened by the political executive seizing absolute advantage of lapses in the parliament's own managerial behaviour. In 1978, for example, the Queensland auditor-general, Jim Peel, submitted a report to parliament which identified twenty-three serving and former MLAs as having misused public funds by converting air-travel vouchers for domestic flights to entitlements for international flights, using travel vouchers for family members, and claiming expenses which had not been incurred. Until that time the administration of these matters had been the province of the Speaker, acting within cabinet guidelines. Bjelke-Petersen chose to use the Peel findings as justification for transferring the administration of a number of matters from the Speaker (and the parliament) to the Premier's Department. Jim Houghton, the Speaker at that time, attempted unsuccessfully to resist. He made repeated public criticisms of the Queensland parliament's performance.

Houghton's concerns about the fate of the parliamentary institution were not apparently shared by his successor, Selwyn Muller. Shortly after his election as Speaker Muller was reported as saying that it was the Speaker's responsibility to apply the wishes of the government he represented (Courier-Mail, 8 August 1979). Muller's rulings also attracted scrutiny, perhaps most notably the ruling he made on 11 September 1979 that the Opposition could not ask questions in Question Time about the controversial Essential Services Bill, then before the House. The ruling was based, apparently, on the argument that questions could be asked on the bill when it moved to the Second Reading. None the less, the Speaker's interpretation sat somewhat uneasily alongside the then standing order No. 68, and against the Speaker's own allowance of a question on the same bill in the previous week.

Muller's apparent lack of understanding of standing orders was also to prove a major difficulty for the government on 4 August
1983, the day when the self-destruction of the state’s coalition was initiated by disagreement within the government parties over a Liberal backbench motion in favour of bringing forward discussion on the possible establishment of a public accounts committee. If the Speaker had understood a point of order raised by Liberal leader Dr Llew Edwards about the necessity for a division on the fateful motion moved by a Liberal backbencher, the sacking of Terry White, a senior Liberal minister, may have been averted. In supporting that motion White had enraged both Bjelke-Petersen and Edwards; they claimed he had broken cabinet solidarity. For his part, White argued that his action in supporting that motion was not inconsistent with cabinet policy.

Just a few days later, on 9 August, the Speaker’s actions again proved to be significant. On that occasion the Speaker assumed the chair at 11 a.m. The premier immediately attempted to address the chair, but as he did so the Opposition leader, Mr Keith Wright, rose on a matter of privilege. (Parliamentary privilege refers to the special rights granted to parliament and its members designed to ensure the independence of both and to enable parliamentary business to be carried out without external pressure or fear of prosecution.) Under standing orders a matter of privilege normally takes precedence over all other business. Yet the Speaker refused to hear Wright’s privilege call, instead allowing the premier to recommend the indefinite adjournment of the parliament’s sitting, a proposition which attracted both National and Liberal support. For the government the Speaker’s ruling was politically expedient; it prevented the possibility of the Opposition taking parliamentary advantage of disarray on the government side.

A politicised public service

Under Westminster conventions, the role of the public service is to provide the government of the day with advice which is professional, impartial and fearless. Indeed, security of tenure has long been associated with public employment as a positive encouragement of such behaviour. The assumption is that a distinction can and should be drawn between making policy and
implementing it, and that the public service’s role is confined to the latter activity. Above all, the loyalty of the public service should be to the government of the day, yet the qualities instilled in public servants, and encouraged by their conditions of employment, supposedly ensure an ability to adapt flexibly and readily to changes of minister, policy, priority and government.

Public services everywhere have had difficulty in applying these conventions to the circumstances of modern government. A century ago, when many of these traditions were developed, the activity of government was both limited in scope and predominantly clerical in character. Since that time the party system has become entrenched, while the activities of government have broadened in both scope and complexity. The distinctions between making and administering policy have consequently become blurred, in the process threatening and sometimes confounding traditional notions of ministerial responsibility and public service neutrality.

There was an almost total lack of interest by government in Queensland in such matters, at least until the late 1980s. Over the years a variety of practices had become established which, taken together, badly impeded the ability of the Queensland public service to be professional or impartial, much less fearless. This situation did not appear to unsettle Joh Bjelke-Petersen. Asked on one occasion in the late 1970s why Queensland had not followed several other states and the Commonwealth by having a broad-ranging public service inquiry, the premier cunningly parried the question by responding: "But I make enquiries of the public service every day of the week."

Even if Bjelke-Petersen recognised the challenges facing governments in modernising their machinery, he cared little for such matters. Issues of administrative or parliamentary reform were "hoo-ha" to him. Besides, as an Opposition backbencher he had observed the considerable advantages accruing to a government able to work cosily with its public service. Sir Joh often excused or justified his political behaviour by referring, not surprisingly, to practices which had been perpetrated by his opponents thirty or forty years before. For example, he probably remembered the decision of Billy Moore, the Health and Home
Affairs minister in the Gair Labor government, to appoint his own private secretary to the position of departmental under secretary. This represented a stunning leap in public service classification terms, a leap which was greeted with outrage at the time. Or perhaps Joh Bjelke-Petersen remembered a little further back to other examples where other Labor premiers attended generously to the public service careers of their relatives.

Whatever Bjelke-Petersen's recollections of past practices, the public service remained professionally unattended during his long premiership. Until the 1980s employees were recruited mainly at the "base grade clerk" level and were almost entirely Queensland school-leavers; in recent years this recruitment of school-leavers has been supplemented with increasingly significant intakes of new graduates from Queensland's universities and colleges. However, above the high school and graduate points of entry recruitment from outside the public service and recruitment from outside Queensland, is still discouraged. While appeals against outside appointments are not permitted, such appointments are nevertheless able to be successfully upended by rights of objection which are available to inside candidates; any such objections must be considered before a recommendation for an outside appointment is finalised. Furthermore, until 1985 prospective appointees from other states or the Commonwealth were unable to have leave and related entitlements recognised on transfer to Queensland. Little wonder that the Queensland public service has remained such a closed shop. Even today, virtually no one is appointed to permanent head level from outside the public service, much less from outside Queensland.

There are two main routes to permanent head and other senior levels of appointment. The first, the traditional public service path, is the "slow track" means of floating slowly to the top on the basis of a lifetime of devoted service. Until recently, length of service was the primary criterion for promotion. The other, a more accelerated route available typically to young males who have been targeted as talented people by the minister or the minister's mandarins, is by means of attachment to a minister as a private secretary or press secretary. At least forty-five individuals who currently hold or who over the last generation have held the
position of permanent head or another very senior appointment, have had stints as ministerial staffers during their careers.

Those who have had the best chance of all for high promotion appear to be those who have worked for the premier of the day. Graham Swan (later under secretary, Employment and Industrial Affairs), Col Curtis (under secretary, Premier's Department) and Col Douglas (chairman of the Public Service Board) were all once staffers for Sir Frank Nicklin. And seven of the personal staff of Sir Joh when either a minister or premier, later secured very senior public service posts: D.K. Houston (under secretary, Works); Allen Callaghan (under secretary, Arts, National Parks and Sport); Stan Wilcox (under secretary, Arts, National Parks and Sport following Callaghan's jailing for misusing government funds); Russ Roberts (member, Public Service Board, and other posts); Ken Crooke (director, Government News and Information Services); Gary Gilbert (director of Sport); and John Walsh (deputy director, Office of Public Service Personnel Management).

Career success for former ministerial staffers has not been confined to those attached only to National party ministers. Among those who once worked with Liberal ministers and later secured senior appointments are Ian Staib, Peter Hall, John Leech, Len Smyth, Fred Albietz, Bernie Yorke, Cedric Johnson, John Bellert, Kev Leyshon, and Allan Pettigrew. Others have managed to walk the political tightrope, a task expected of career officials but historically one not necessarily appreciated by politicians on either side in Queensland. The late Sir David Muir enjoyed a distinguished career during the coalition years as chairman of the Public Service Board, Queensland's ombudsman, agent-general in London, and first director of the state's Department of Industrial Development; he was once also on the personal staff of Labor premier William Forgan Smith.

While career advancement is often accelerated for ministerial staffers, in a number of instances, several of them in recent years, the pace has been breathtaking, even allowing for the talent of the appointees. Allen Callaghan, Stan Wilcox, Ken Crooke, and Russ Roberts, all former staffers to Sir Joh, departed the premier's office to assume, directly or soon after, highly paid, senior posts. The career path of Russ Roberts has been one of the most
spectacular. In just eight years he moved from private secretary to the premier, to secretary of Cabinet, thence to commissioner of the Public Service Board. While commissioner he was appointed to the Savage Committee of public sector review which, ironically, led to the abolition of the Public Service Board. Roberts was then appointed director of the newly created Office of Public Service Personnel Management, the effective successor to that board.

There have been others who have enjoyed a meteoric rise. Kevin Edwards, formerly attached to National party minister Vince Lester, moved in the space of four years from ministerial private secretary to Industrial Registrar and thence to a permanent appointment as an industrial commissioner, on the equivalent of a District Court judge’s salary of $88,000 (in 1988 terms). Brian Ferris, on the other hand, moved from a position as Ivan Gibbs’s ministerial private secretary, which he held for some five years (he had previously been a clerk in the Mines Department), directly to that of commissioner for Housing, with a salary of $80,000 (in 1988 terms).

Sometimes the rewards extended to ministerial staffers for outstanding and loyal service have been enjoyed immediately. As a group, ministerial staff have received salary classification hikes over recent years, while most of their departmental colleagues have been salary-bound by public service wage freezes or, at best, salary restrictions. Beyond that, some ministerial staffers have been singled out for especially generous treatment, in the process receiving salary advancements bearing little relation to salary decisions made by the government for other posts. In June 1987, for example, Sir Joh pushed through cabinet large or otherwise exceptional pay increases for three of his key staff: his pilot, Beryl Young, who received an increase of $27,000 (from $48,000 to $75,000); his press secretary, Ken Crooke, who advanced $9000 to $58,000; and his departmental research officer, Wendy Armstrong, who moved up $2000 to $45,220.

Regardless of which promotional track an individual follows, cabinet applies intense personal and political scrutiny on all who aspire to appointment or promotion at senior levels. In fact, it vets all public service appointments as far down as the middle executive classification grade 1-15 and, for police force posts, down
to the level of senior sergeant. While the government may justify its interest in terms of ensuring an efficient and responsible (and recently, honest) public service, its concern for such matters has never extended to an insistence that all senior posts be advertised. The Public Service Management and Employment Act 1988 does set out requirements for advertising senior posts, but a less-heralded clause in that legislation allows governor-in-council (in effect, state cabinet) to waive the requirement if it chooses.

That same 1988 legislation also provides for the introduction of contract employment for those occupying the top 3 or 4 per cent of public service posts. Such contract arrangements are now not uncommon in Australian states, but the move toward contracts in Queensland is widely interpreted within the public service not so much as a means to develop an efficient and flexible system of public management, but as a further and very blunt attempt at politicisation.

Other practices have developed within the Queensland public service which reward personal loyalty, punish perceived disloyalty, instil an atmosphere of fear, and generally help to weaken the career structure of the public service. Public service positions may be arranged for defeated or retired government politicians, for friends and family of ministers, for friends of senior public servants, or for National party associates. One particularly unsubtle instance of this occurred in 1987 when the Premier's Department created a number of contract public service posts to assist the "Joh for PM" campaign. On the other hand, some public servants have been treated as little more than enemies of the state because, as private citizens, they have opposed the government on issues unrelated to their work, or because their professional honesty has embarrassed the government, or because they have contested seats at state elections on behalf of the government's political opponents. The careers and personal lives of these individuals have often been destroyed in consequence of their actions. John Sinclair, who led the fight to protect Fraser Island from sandmining, is the most prominent example of such victimisation. Ironically, he was once a member of the National (then Country) party! An adult education officer in the state Department of Education, he sued Joh Bjelke-Petersen for defamation.
Sinclair won the case, but Bjelke-Petersen appealed and the decision was overturned by the Full Court. Quite apart from having to pay the extensive legal costs arising from the matter, Sinclair endured a very difficult time in his public service position. Threats were made to abolish his post and he was issued with several transfers in the space of a few years. His career and family life in tatters, he moved to Sydney.

Revelations before the Fitzgerald Inquiry of the rorting of ministerial expenses pointed to the break-down of accountability which had occurred in Queensland. But this break-down was not perpetrated by the state’s politicians alone. After all, the very rorts they had developed, such as fudging ministerial or parliamentary expenses and blurring personal and business costs, were known about by many senior public servants who themselves participated in the administration of these practices. In particular, it was they who administered the notorious voucher system and who verified the items of expenditure being claimed as "necessary expenditures".

The collusion of politicians and some senior public servants in the "working" of this voucher system deserves special mention. Officially, there are three stages (prescribed by the Treasurer’s Instructions) covering the process of expending government funds on goods or services. The first is the departmental requisition form (Treasurer’s Instruction No. 92) which sets out particulars of the goods, services or works to be provided, and the estimated price thereof, the fund and budget heading to which the relevant expenditure is to be charged, and the signature of the officer authorising the expenditure. The second stage involves the completion of a departmental order form (covered by Treasurer’s Instruction No. 93) which is completed by an ordering officer who receives requisition forms from throughout the department. That person, who has specialised knowledge of stores and purchasing procedures, as well as of the items which are available, completes an official order form on the basis of the details contained on each individual requisition; this order form is then addressed to a particular supply source chosen on the basis of competitive price, availability of goods and services requested, the standard of product supplied, and so on. The final stage (covered by Treas-
urer's Instruction No. 97) requires a government expenditure voucher for every payment of public moneys for the supply of goods, the rendering of a service (including a periodic service), the construction of works, and so on. The voucher and all its accompanying details - including the signatures of various authorised accounting officers and the invoice for the services provided - is the basis for preparing the cheque to pay the supplier. In that sense the term voucher is inaccurate: the forms which are used are really multi-purpose expenditure claim forms utilised for everything from obtaining reimbursement of personal travelling expenses to purchasing machinery or to paying contractors for constructing a building.

Rorting the voucher system, which occurs across many departments, but which is probably at its worse in the trust accounts of certain departments, is achieved by a number of means. These include:

- ordering a piece of equipment or some consultancy services for, say, $60,000, but arranging for the supplier to invoice this amount in two or three smaller lots, thus avoiding having to seek ministerial approval (a public service permanent head or delegated officer has such authority up to $50,000; amounts between $50,000 and $100,000 require ministerial approval while those over $100,000 require that of cabinet or, more correctly, Executive Council);
- not obtaining quotes for certain work or services, and giving that work to suppliers who are on the "favoured" list;
- completing requisition forms and order forms only after the invoice has been received, that is, at the same time the expenditure voucher is being completed. This is effected by backdating requisitions (which are often not numbered) and by completing orders from a book or books of order forms kept aside especially for this purpose. Because audits take place at known times, internal procedures can be most irregular over much of the financial year;
- debiting ministerial expenses against departmental expenditure headings such as travelling expenses, postage, freight and incidentals. This practice is known, not surprisingly, as "hiding";
arranging payment in cases where there may be a lack of evidence that the work involved in the consultancy or the contract has been completed;

- failing to secure prior authorisation for expenditure on individual items.

The administration of the so-called voucher system is now undergoing major change, with the introduction of a U.S.-based system developed by Management Science of America (MSA). Yet there is no indication that the MSA system will be able to cope with these longstanding problems any more efficiently than the preceding arrangements.

Public servants may seek to defend their participation in activities such as those listed above by pointing to the political pressures on them or to their institutional obligations of loyalty and confidentiality. On the other hand, over the years some of these senior public servants have themselves had access to credit cards, luxury motor vehicles, and a range of other perquisites of office. In effect, there has been a conspiracy of silence among some senior public servants and ministers in the face of any outside investigations of these practices. Some permanent heads have also gone to unusual lengths to maintain this silence, developing elaborately secretive procedures to ensure that not even their departmental officers (other than whoever processes the paperwork) have the opportunity to peruse these "sensitive" expenses.

Internal investigations have been equally discouraged. Snap audits are very unusual and individual auditors have been known to be reprimanded for arriving at a department unannounced. The auditors also are provided with a prescribed list of tasks which, while being historically familiar, will not necessarily probe all vouchers for large amounts or areas of likely abuse. Individual auditors may be intimidated, too, by the consequences of being over-zealous. Valid or otherwise though it may be, a perception exists amongst many auditors that an adverse report on a department may backfire against the officer who has "blown the whistle".
The cumulative effect of all these practices is that, for a very long time, public servants in Queensland have been given a clear sense of what the state government expects of them. They, too, have had their expectations of the government in terms of its attitude to their interests, which include the maintenance of a public service closed shop. One former Liberal minister was fond of remarking, "If you look after the public service, it will look after you".

Street-smart public servants have also been aware that the protection afforded to the government by the state’s electoral arrangements has meant, in effect, that the ruling party represented "the only game in town". There was no prospect of a change of government and changes in administrative practice were not encouraged because they could threaten the longstanding cosiness of arrangements between the government and its administrative advisers. In other words, the public service as an institution came to share the "values" of its political masters. It thus became politicised, not so much in a directly partisan sense but by way of sharing the benefits of office and the threats posed by government defeat at the polls.

This is not to say that individual public servants have always been unwilling or unable to maintain their professionalism and independence, to hold their ground against political interference, or to secure top posts solely on the basis of merit. Some ministers also have been keen to reward merit and have been sensitive to the position of their professional administrative advisers. Nevertheless, the public service as a whole has not sampled changes of policy or practice; nor has it expected such changes. It has fitted itself to the government’s political needs and become, in effect, a partisan institution of policy-making. Some people have been cowered by the system while the consciences of others have been bought off by the system’s rewards. And those who have maintained their ground in the face of pressure have often done so at substantial risk to their careers.

There have also been other less visible though equally destructive factors working against the operation of a healthy career service. Although rarely spoken of openly, the bonds of Freemasonry are still apparent, as are Catholic networks. In the public service the
Masonic influence, which is known as the goat-rider or knuckle-thumper factor, is said to have been influential in the now-dismembered Public Service Board, and still remains relevant within certain elements of the police force. The Catholic influence has been marshalled under the umbrella of the "Knights of the Southern Cross" group and has been especially prevalent in the Justice Department and the Lands Department, as well as in the police force, where it is dubbed the "green Mafia". Illogical though it may seem, there has also developed a network of influence, again centred in the police force, which involves Freemasons who are also Catholics. Although nowadays impossible to measure, and all too easy to exaggerate, such sectarian influences historically have been strong. Their impact, now diminishing, has also been divisive on institutions in general, and the public service in particular.

The police as an arm of government

Politicisation has extended to the police force. Throughout his premiership Joh Bjelke-Petersen, himself once Police minister, used the Queensland police force as an active political agent to enforce government policy. This is precisely what the system of checks and balances in a parliamentary democracy should guard against. At best, the police force in Queensland has been regarded by the state government as just another public service department, responsible through its minister to the parliament. But the police force should not be so equated, because in addition it has a responsibility to uphold the law, to exercise original powers granted by common law. The concept of original powers, which forms the basis for the theory of police independence, sets out the obligation upon police to enforce the law of the land. It is the possession of such original powers which allows a police force (and its members) to ignore, theoretically at least, an unlawful direction from a minister.

Not since the departure of former police commissioner Ray Whitrod has the force sought to protect its broader responsibility to uphold the law independently of ministers. And sometimes there is a conflict between the two. Evidence by suspended police
commissioner Sir Terence Lewis to the Fitzgerald Inquiry revealed, for example, that successive Police ministers supported the "containment" of prostitution, even though it is an illegal activity in Queensland. Sir Terence had followed the ministerial advice, obviously preferring to acknowledge the realities of political power than to insist on a strict observance of the law (albeit in this instance an impossible one to enforce).

This interpretation by Lewis of his position as police commissioner was one explanation for his great political success in the office. His predecessor, Ray Whitrod, had not been able to reconcile his position with such ease; nor did he seek to do so. Whitrod publicly clashed with Joh Bjelke-Petersen over allegations of police brutality in a street march incident, and again over the reported behaviour of police who raided and "torched" a commune at Cedar Bay in north Queensland. In both cases Ray Whitrod was concerned about possible police misconduct, actions which might have been in breach of either the Queensland Police Act, the Queensland Police Rules, or both. He wanted an inquiry into both incidents to ensure that police had not broken the law. Joh Bjelke-Petersen saw it very differently. In his very early days as premier, when his own parliamentary support was soft, he had brought hundreds of police to Brisbane in 1971 to enable the government to adopt a tough stand against demonstrators at a Rugby Union match involving the touring South African team, the Springboks. This action helped to earn him a reputation as a strong leader, a useful quality in the state of Queensland, and he quickly recognised the benefits of cultivating it further.

After Whitrod's departure in 1976 those in charge of the police force were all too willing to play the game: they were prepared to do the premier's political bidding in return for the special relationship they would enjoy with him. As Colleen Lewis has shown in an unpublished thesis (Griffith University, 1988), this worked in a number of ways. In the first place there had developed a communication pipeline between the police force and the premier. This was particularly helpful if the Police minister was not perceived as "sympathetic" to the force, as in the case of Max Hodges, the minister at the time Whitrod was commissioner. In
Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, premier of Queensland from 1968 to 1987.
The association of Joh Bjelke-Petersen with Queensland was unambiguous in this National Party poster.
Russell Hinze, long-serving minister for Local Government, Main Roads and Racing, said that "[in] some of the seats of Queensland . . . all you have to do is get the National party tag and you can win forever and a day". (Courtesy Queensland Newspapers)
National party trustee and Bjelke-Petersen confidant Sir Edward Lyons was chairman of the TAB. He is pictured here at the tote at the Members’ Enclosure at Eagle Farm Racecourse, Brisbane. (Inset photo, courtesy Queensland Newspapers)
National party organisation duo — state president Sir Robert Sparkes (above), and executive director Mike Evans. (Courtesy Queensland Newspapers)
In 1981-82 Bjelke-Petersen rode roughshod over Liberal attorney-general Sam Doumany in the selection of the new chief justice for Queensland. (Courtesy Alan Moir and Courier-Mail)

Sir Robert Sparkes, National party state president, was principal tactician for the party in its dealings with the Liberal coalition partners on the ticklish question of the zonal electoral system. The Liberal party was concerned about the continued effect of the electoral arrangements on its own fortunes but preferred the comfort of coalition and the accoutrements of office to the harsh realities of political wilderness. (Courtesy Alan Moir and Courier-Mail)

Throughout his premiership Joh Bjelke-Petersen managed to prevent any move for a foreign land register. This was in the face of opposition from almost every major political group in Queensland, including his own party organisation. (Courtesy Alan Moir and Courier-Mail)
The premier’s attitude to parliament (above), and the state Liberal party (both 1983). (Courtesy Alan Moir and Courier-Mail)
In waging his "Joh for PM" campaign, the premier badly misjudged the Australian electorate's preparedness to follow the Queensland lead. (Courtesy Sean Leahy and Courier-Mail)

For many years the Queensland ALP, preoccupied by its internal difficulties, was not taken seriously as a possible alternative government. (Courtesy Sean Leahy and Courier-Mail)
Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen was questioned at the Fitzgerald Inquiry about anonymous donations left in the premier's office. (Courtesy Wil Mitchell and Queensland Times)
Labor leaders who faced Joh in his final years: right, Keith Wright (1982-84), below, Nev Warburton (1984-88). (Courtesy Queensland Newspapers)
Labor premier Ned Hanlon introduced the first zonal gerrymander in Queensland in 1949. In this photo, Hanlon is pictured viewing electoral maps in his Given Terrace, Paddington home on his 62nd birthday on 1 October 1949. (Courtesy John Oxley Library)
Clockwise from right, the 1985–86 electoral redistribution commissioners: John Andrews (chairman), Sir Thomas Covacevich, Col Pearson. (Courtesy Queensland Newspapers)
The Bjelke-Petersen cabinet (above) and the Ahern cabinet (below) — both premiers flanked by ministers in order of seniority.
The post-Joh combatants: top, Mike Ahern, below left, Wayne Goss, below right, Angus Innes. (Courtesy Queensland Newspapers)
In 1988 Mike Ahern attempted to dissociate his administration from Bjelke-Petersen’s, a strategy questioned by this ALP advertisement. Ahern had been a National party politician for twenty years, eight of them as a member of Bjelke-Petersen’s cabinet.
In fact, Hodges did regard himself as supportive of the police. He just did not see the police as being above the law.

Alternatively, an individual Police minister's interest in pursuing a specific allegation against the force, or one or more of its members, might be dampened if it were known that the premier would always back the force in such circumstances. For example, in early 1983 Police minister Bill Glasson announced that he wanted to rid Queensland of prostitution and gambling because they made the public suspicious that police received bribes. The police union sought an apology from the minister for the statement and the premier offered Glasson some blunt advice about his choice of words. Glasson appeared thereafter to soften his approach on the subject.

In her study Colleen Lewis highlights the special relationship the police enjoyed with Joh Bjelke-Petersen, and the extent to which his habitual defence of the force, regardless of the allegations involved, allowed it to sidestep charges of corruption. That same relationship also enabled the force to evade or undermine any attempts to make its operations more accountable to the public.

The Fitzgerald Inquiry revealed widespread police misconduct involving illegal gambling, prostitution and drugs. There was also evidence that individual police officers had falsified evidence and perjured themselves in order to secure convictions. Yet, amazingly, the body established to investigate allegations of police misconduct, the Police Complaints Tribunal, reported that it had received only isolated complaints of corruption over the period of its existence from 1982 to 1987, a time when misconduct was flourishing.

The Police Complaints Tribunal supposedly has an "arms length" relationship with the police force. Yet its chairman over a number of years, Eric Pratt, a District Court judge and former police officer, was identified by Sir Terence Lewis at the Fitzgerald Inquiry as one of his "special friends with whom he could discuss any matter in confidence". Pratt was also a friend of Bill Gunn, who became Police minister in 1986. In other words, the tribunal was headed by a friend of both the commissioner of the police force it was investigating and, from 1986, the minister responsible for the police force. Another member of the tribunal since its
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inception, Senior Sergeant Col Chant, was president of the police union; he was also close to people who were the subject of investigations. In all, the tribunal did not behave as a body endeavouring to secure police accountability, but one whose operation was entirely reactive, and defensive of the interests of the police force.

This lack of activity on the part of the Police Complaints Tribunal indicates a great deal about the position enjoyed by the police, the disregard for police accountability which had developed, and the community's reaction to the situation. The police force, courtesy of its connection with the premier, had ensured that the measures to strengthen accountability recommended in the 1977 Lucas Report were ignored. Some years later the Sturgess Report into allegations of police involvement in child pornography and male prostitution named people who subsequently were mentioned at the Fitzgerald Inquiry in connection with illegal casinos and female brothels. Yet the police commissioner, Sir Terence Lewis, told the Fitzgerald Inquiry that he had never read the Sturgess Report. This suggested his priorities lay elsewhere and reflected his political complacency, given that his diaries contained extensive details about the newspapers, novels and other reports he read which were much less relevant to his police work than the Sturgess Report.

Sir Terence Lewis also extended his interests into mainstream National party politics. As his diaries revealed, Sir Terence involved himself in police work at the most mundane and detailed level when it involved individuals close to the government. Mention was made in his diaries of a traffic notice issued to Beryl Young, Sir Joh's pilot, and of an apparent attempt to cancel a drink-driving action against National party trustee Sir Edward Lyons. Lewis also involved himself in a remarkable range of activities quite outside his sphere of responsibility. These included phone calls to Lyons regarding imperial honours; to Sir Joh regarding his likely successor as premier, the appointment of the next governor, and the 1985-86 electoral redistribution; and to a senior minister, Don Lane, to discuss his own Police minister. The diaries of Sir Terence Lewis also revealed that between 1976 and 1987 he saw Sir Joh 134 times and that Sir Joh telephoned him 197
times (Courier-Mail, 12 October 1988). The previous commissioner, Ray Whitrod, had earlier told the Fitzgerald Inquiry that he had personal dealings with the premier on only three occasions in six years.

The Fitzgerald Inquiry revealed the extent of personal and professional alienation felt by many honest police because of the corruption of the force which had taken place. Yet there was little those officers felt they could do, apart from resign. Most of them were all too well aware that cabinet controlled all police promotions down to the level of senior sergeant, and that police transfers were non-appealable. They had seen the victimisation of police officers who had spoken out (Ross Dickson, for example), and they knew of the seeming reluctance of the Police Complaints Tribunal to do other than reinforce the position of the force's ruling clique.

Political penetration of the judiciary

Political interference has also extended to Queensland's judiciary, although that activity has not been confined to recent years, having been evident notably during the premierships of Labor leaders William Forgan Smith and Vince Gair. It is, however, the sequence of events which culminated in the appointment of Mr Justice Dormer Andrews as chief justice which provides the most public evidence of political interference in Queensland's judiciary during the Bjelke-Petersen premiership. The incident was especially interesting because it involved not merely a conflict between the executive and judicial arms of government, but also conflicts within the coalition; as well, it was a test of the extent of influence of Sir Edward Lyons, National party trustee and a personal confidant of Joh Bjelke-Petersen.

At cabinet's meeting on 21 December 1981 the state attorney-general, Sam Doumany, a Liberal, put forward the name of Mr Justice Jim Douglas to replace Sir Charles Wanstall as chief justice. According to journalist Evan Whitton, the only person to object in cabinet to the recommendation was Joh Bjelke-Petersen, who launched a stinging attack upon the judiciary. The matter was then deferred to allow time for other names to be considered and
for battle lines to be drawn up for what was likely to be a difficult struggle.

Sam Doumany had made his recommendation of Mr Justice Douglas on the basis of consultations he had had with a wide cross-section of the legal community, judges and practitioners alike. Traditionally, elevation to the top post had been decided on the basis of seniority within the Supreme Court. In addition to meeting that requirement, Mr Justice Douglas enjoyed very strong personal support for the post from within the profession. Other people, however, had other interests. For some months reports had circulated that Sir Edward Lyons preferred Mr Justice Dormer Andrews, seventh in seniority, for the position. Joh Bjelke-Petersen was known to hold a general objection to the view that the preferred choice of the judiciary should be automatically endorsed by the government. Perhaps he harboured a legitimate objection to the system of judicial seniority. If he did, he would not have been the first Queensland premier to have done so. However, journalist Quentin Dempster suggested another explanation in the Brisbane Telegraph at the time. This was that the premier was annoyed with the judiciary as a result of being barred from officially attending the opening ceremony of the new Supreme Court building several months earlier on the grounds that he was a litigant before the courts at the time.

Prior to the January 1982 cabinet meeting at which the chief justice appointment was to be resolved, attorney-general Sam Doumany gave the impression that he regarded his job as "on the line" over the matter. At the meeting National ministers supported the premier's strong preference for Mr Justice Andrews, while the Liberals continued to support the attorney-general's recommendation of Mr Justice Douglas. The name of Mr Justice Andrews apparently was not even on the list of alternatives the attorney-general presented to cabinet. After a difficult debate a compromise candidate, Mr Justice Walter Campbell, was agreed upon and he secured the post. Following an equally messy debate later the same day Mr Justice Andrews, on the recommendation of the premier, was appointed senior puisne judge. The appointment of Andrews occurred only over the strong objections of the attorney-general and his Liberal ministerial colleagues, all of whom refused
to sign the Executive Council minute containing the appointments. The governor nevertheless endorsed the minute, thereby confirming both appointments. Three years later, in 1985, Mr Justice Andrews went on to secure the top job following Sir Walter Campbell's further elevation to the post of governor.

A much darker side to the political involvement in the chief justice appointment issue emerged more than six years later, during the course of the Fitzgerald Inquiry. In a statutory declaration to the inquiry on 6 December 1988, former Liberal minister Terry White said that, during its deliberations on the chief justice issue, state cabinet had been told by Liberal minister Don Lane that Mr Justice Douglas had cast a postal vote for Labor in the 1972 state election. Mr Justice Douglas was an elector in Lane's seat of Merthyr. Former Liberal minister and deputy premier, Sir Llew Edwards, and former National party minister, Vic Sullivan, also claimed in statutory declarations to the Fitzgerald Inquiry that Mr Justice Douglas was overruled for the chief justice post after cabinet was told of his postal vote. Another witness before the Fitzgerald Inquiry, Sir Edward Lyons, revealed his knowledge of the matter. He told the inquiry that Mr Lane "had found out that Mr Douglas had been overseas and had cast a postal vote and he [Mr Lane] saw those postal votes" (transcript reproduced in Courier-Mail, 1 December 1988). A son of Mr Justice Douglas, Bob Douglas QC, also submitted a statutory declaration regarding his recollection of the matter. In his statement, dated 2 December 1988, Douglas declared that at a social occasion in 1973 Don Lane had approached him and said "Bob, I am disappointed in your father". According to Douglas Lane then said to him that he was aware that Mr Justice Douglas had voted for Labor because he had seen his postal vote. For his part, Lane staunchly denied these allegations, claiming in a statutory declaration that he did not see any postal vote cast by Mr Justice Douglas. A Liberal party scrutineer in Merthyr at the 1972 state election, Ida Margaret Mackay, also tendered to the Fitzgerald Inquiry a statutory declaration in which she indicated that, to her knowledge, Lane had not touched or looked at any vote that was being handled by the Returning Officer.
The judiciary in Queensland also may have contributed to its own apparent vulnerability to political interference by not distancing itself sufficiently from the political process. Evidence before the Fitzgerald Inquiry suggested almost tawdry examples of legal identities ingratiating themselves with the government or its political friends in order to secure, it seems, judicial appointments or promotions. Such behaviour compromises the judiciary which, in order to administer justice in an impartial fashion, has a responsibility to ensure that it remains at arm’s length from the government of the day. And although such practices may not be confined to Queensland, the appointment of judges to the boards of statutory bodies may be seen as exposing the judiciary to untoward influence from the government. Such appointments are often prestigious and highly valued; they are also for fixed terms, and most allow for reappointment. That necessarily allows for the possibility of judges being seen to be beholden to the government of the day.

Institutional "dry rot" in Queensland has meant that institutional checks have failed to ensure that the government operates with a measure of efficiency and accountability. But it is not only the institutional mechanisms built into the political system which have failed. So too have the external checks purportedly provided by the parties of political opposition, and the state’s media. And it is the performance of these groups to which attention now turns.
Institutional "dry rot" in parliament, the public service, police force and judiciary has also assisted in neutralising the role of other groups to debate and criticise, to offer alternative views and policies and, in a more general sense, to provide controls on the exercise of political power. In Queensland there has been a longstanding disregard for such activities. Moreover, the seemingly invulnerable position of the government, generated over the years by a loading of the electoral dice, has not encouraged free and open debate. Yet the cause of free and open debate also requires a healthy party system and a critical media - characteristics which have not been especially noticeable in Queensland.

Both in the style of its operation and in its actions the state government over the years has done much to create this situation. Yet it is one which has not been brought about by the government alone. Under the Westminster system the Opposition has a recognised role to question the government, to expose failures of policy and administration, and to present the community with an alternative to the government of the day. But the Labor party in Queensland for many years failed to provide a viable alternative. The record of the Liberal party is no better. When in coalition with the Nationals, the Liberals were prepared too often to prostitute their principles for the accoutrements of office. And, in the political wilderness since 1983, the Liberals have struggled with the problem of identifying a role for themselves in Queensland politics. With one or two notable exceptions the media too has failed. It has not provided the community with a detached and critical perspective on what was happening inside the governmental apparatus.
The failure of Labor

Abuses of power had also occurred during the long period of Labor government in Queensland but Labor in Opposition since 1957, at least until the 1980s, did little to criticise the National government on such counts. The state ALP had enjoyed forty years of almost unbroken government at the time the party split and fell from office in 1957. Over that period Labor had learnt well how to exercise power and deploy the fruits of office. The one-party system which the Nationals so strenuously sought to refine had its roots in Labor's long occupancy of the Treasury benches. It can even be argued that the Bjelke-Petersen premiership might have developed differently had Sir Joh not spent his first ten years in parliament as an Opposition backbencher. He learnt well from his early political experiences.

Labor in office had sown the seeds of the one-party state. Like the Nationals many years later, the ALP in office preached the gospel of progress and development and characterised itself as the only party capable of securing economic growth and a stable political environment. Reform agendas were sometimes set aside as the energy of the party was channelled into maintaining the regime. Criticism of the government's policies from outside the state was repelled by Canberra-bashing pronouncements designed to strike parochial chords. Dissent from inside was sometimes suppressed brutally, as in the case of the railway strikes of the 1940s.

There were other occasions when the actions of Labor in power diminished the standing of parliament, the judiciary and the public service; there were also instances of corruption and cronyism involving friends or relatives of the government. Over that forty year period Queensland also failed to make public education a high enough priority. And it failed to industrialise its economic base to any significant degree and thereby attract a more diversified migrant blend. The society that developed was thus rather more closed in its attitudes and more suspicious of outsiders than in most other states. And most ironically of all, it was a Labor government which introduced Queensland's zonal electoral system, a system which, following Labor's split, was used by the party's
political opponents to assist in keeping the ALP permanently out of office.

The 1957 split debilitated Queensland Labor. Not only was the party disunited but also it soon realised just how difficult it would be to regain its seats in the bush. The Country party-led coalition moved quickly to remodel the electoral zones in its favour. And, in a related move, preferential voting was introduced in 1963 as a means of maximising the non-Labor vote, and thereby underlining the electoral benefits of coalition government. The Country party was also quick to recognise other elements of Labor's legacy which, if carefully exploited, could provide a major downpayment on the new government's political mortgage; for example, maintaining the overwhelming emphasis on economic development, stridently defending the state's inhabitants against perceived incursions by the federal government, and ensuring that the parliament remained weak and the public service blinkered.

During the 1960s the Labor party in Queensland struggled with factional crises as well as with the continuing presence of the breakaway group, the Democratic Labor Party (DLP). Nevertheless, by the early 1970s Labor had managed to develop some viability as an Opposition, helped significantly by a Country party that was unsure of its own future and tentative about the performance of its new leader, Joh Bjelke-Petersen. This translated to vote gains for the ALP at the 1972 state election when it actually outpolled the combined primary vote of the Country and Liberal parties, but not to sufficient seats to allow it to come even close to winning office.

The ALP's position then deteriorated sharply. Apart from its factionally induced haemorrhaging, the state Labor party watched in dismay as Joh Bjelke-Petersen was transformed in status from the view his opponents held of him as a political buffoon to a leading national identity in conservative politics. His attacks on the Whitlam federal government were relentless. The paranoia he cultivated in the state against the "centralist, socialist" policies of the Whitlam administration also was boosted by federal Labor's inability to handle him. It was one thing for the premier to provoke or attack the prime minister, but the Country party - now in the process of changing its name and broadening its policies -
characterised any attack on Joh Bjelke-Petersen or his government as an attack on all Queenslanders and their cherished way of life. With ALP support in Queensland now free-falling, the premier capitalised on the situation by calling an early state election in December 1974. The outcome for Labor was disastrous: its vote dropped by 10 per cent to just over 36 per cent, and its seat tally to just 11 of the 82 in the Legislative Assembly (down from 33 at the 1972 poll).

Instead of acknowledging the seriousness of the problem, the Whitlam government reacted by blaming the party's poor performance in Queensland on the supposed "difference" of that state from the rest of Australia. It was precisely the "Queensland is different" image which Joh Bjelke-Petersen's Nationals were trying to foster in order to advance their standing. Unwittingly, Gough Whitlam was assisting the National party's strategy. State Labor also assisted by default, failing to recognise that, in such a parochial state, it needed to distance itself from the federal ALP.

Whereas the Nationals continued to make their party's operations more professional throughout this period, Labor's preoccupation with its internal problems suggested that it was neither able nor willing to "play the main game". It failed to develop a party platform attractive to groups such as women and the urban middle class, where its voter support was soft. It also failed to attract many good candidates, which was hardly surprising. The party on numerous occasions gave the impression that preselection contests were not so much about injecting talent into the parliamentary wing with a view to assembling a viable Opposition as about bestowing sinecures on those who had given loyal if undistinguished service to party or faction. Some Labor parliamentarians were honest toilers and others were lazy, but very few of them seemed particularly committed to wresting government from their opponents. The community's reaction to this image of the ALP in Queensland was to lose interest in the state Labor party. The National party's support increased among blue-collar voters, reflecting the growing disenchantment of ALP supporters even in the party's traditional areas of strongest support.

Labor's failure to manage its own affairs contributed directly to the power vacuum in which the Nationals were able to operate. Furthermore, the Labor party can be fairly accused of complicity
in the development of Queensland’s one-party state. It was not until the 1980s that the state ALP seriously embraced the issue of electoral reform. Yet even then it failed to deliver. The party neglected to present a proper submission concerning the redistribution of state electoral boundaries in 1985. The stated reason for declining to be involved was Labor’s loathing for the zonal arrangement which was in place. Many people, however, took the view that the party was opting out of the system. Others believed the stand was intended to dampen factional tensions within the parliamentary party. Whichever the interpretation, neither was flattering to Labor.

The state ALP was also slow to take up the matter of advocating parliamentary procedures to ensure a more accountable legislature. In any case there was no evidence to suggest that Labor politicians behaved any better than those on the government side. In the early 1970s, for example, several ministers in the coalition government (including the premier himself) accepted gift parcels of shares from Comalco, a multinational mining company. However, the ALP’s ability to highlight the obvious conflict of public duty and private interest was totally compromised: Comalco share parcels had also been accepted by ALP officials as well as by relatives of certain Labor MLAs. A few years later, on another matter, a report by the auditor-general, Jim Peel, revealed that some twenty-three former and current MLAs had misused their parliamentary air-travel entitlements; six of them were Labor members.

For almost thirty years Labor behaved not as a viable alternative government, but as a group content to be the party in permanent opposition. It directed most of its attentions inward, and failed to take its Opposition role seriously (hence its opponents and the public could scarcely be expected to do so). The advantage this gave the Nationals was immense and assisted the government to operate in a political vacuum.

**The Queensland Liberals: compromised and isolated**

For the twenty-six years to 1983 the Liberal party in Queensland shared power as the junior partner in the state’s coalition govern-
ment. It was never an altogether comfortable position, the Liberals being forced to accept bridesmaid status in the government even though their popular vote, at least prior to 1977, outstripped that of the Nationals (who gained the advantage by the zonal electoral structure). None the less, the Liberals were prepared to endure the situation because of the advantages and convenience of being part of the government and their conviction that the state's demographic trends would ultimately confer coalition seniority on them. They were also convinced that their political base was safe. The Liberals saw themselves as the party of the business community, the "natural" conservative party for metropolitan and urban voters, the party that was a moderating and reforming influence on the sometimes raw and excessive style of their partners.

On a variety of fronts, however, the Liberals failed to match the Nationals. At first they believed that the Country party, despite changing its name, would be unable to broaden its political base. Yet, as the 1970s progressed, this was precisely what did occur. The Nationals even showed signs of eclipsing the Liberals in their home territory. The business community was responding positively to Joh Bjelke-Petersen's staunchly parochial leadership, as well as to the National party organisation's aggressive networking offensive by which it enlisted support among senior Queensland business identities.

While happy to be a part of a winning team, increasing numbers of Liberals became dejected about the party's long-term prospects in Queensland. They shared government, but the Nationals were now perceived throughout the electorate as the dominant force rather than simply the senior partner in the coalition. The Nationals were becoming more arrogant in their behaviour, and more dismissive of the fate of their partners. Rumblings within Liberal ranks intensified. Some backbenchers, in the name of upholding party policy, sought to differentiate themselves publicly from their parliamentary party hierarchy on matters of government policy. They took a separate stand on the issue of a public accounts committee, for example, and supported modifications to the zonal electoral system. These actions of the Liberal backbench dissidents infuriated the Nationals, who sought to isolate them from
the government. The tension within Liberal ranks increased. Despite the developing crisis the Liberals clung to the comforting view that the electorate still needed them for their sobering influence on the Nationals. Yet, as a party, they were incapable of coping with their dilemma. On the one hand they wanted to present themselves as essentially similar to and compatible with the Nationals, and thus supportive of the government. On the other, they had to differentiate themselves sufficiently from the Nationals in style and policy in order to maintain the electorate’s interest.

In all, the Liberals paid a high price for continued membership of the coalition club: they lost their political identity and suffered humiliation and intimidation at the hands of their more adroit partners.

The one matter which at any time was capable of threatening the coalition’s existence was the zonal electoral system. It was fundamental to the Liberal party’s frustration as a seemingly permanent junior partner. The Liberals pushed for electoral reform on several occasions, most vigorously in 1971 when the Country party sought (ultimately successfully) to remodel the electoral zones to include a coastal farming-based Country zone. Yet the Liberals in coalition were never prepared to risk all by pushing the issue to the limit.

The extent of the Liberal party’s frustration with this situation was apparent in the wake of the 1980 state election. After three weeks of protracted negotiations with the Nationals, the Liberals agreed to re-enter a coalition on essentially unchanged terms. The decision was reached only after much discussion within the Liberal party’s State Executive, which ultimately approved the move by a margin of eighteen votes to ten, with one abstention. Significantly, the party’s state president (Dr John Herron) and two vice-presidents (Dr Leigh Atkinson and Mr Greg Vickery) were among those in the minority. Those supporting the move included the party’s parliamentary leader (Dr Llew Edwards), treasurer (Robert Mathers) and immediate past president (Yvonne McComb). John Moore, who several years later became state president, abstained.
Even more telling for the Liberals in those negotiations was the one concession which they did extract from the Nationals. This was an agreement which read:

The National Party is prepared to give the Liberal Party an undertaking by letter from the president of the National Party to the President of the Liberal Party, that the National Party will not initiate any action on redistribution without consulting the Liberal Party with a view to genuinely endeavouring to reach a mutually acceptable approach.

One Liberal told Quentin Dempster at the time that this meant "They're going to tell us when they'll screw us" (Telegraph, 26 December 1980).

The Liberal party persistently sought to portray itself as the moderating influence in Queensland's coalition. They could point to a few occasions when the Nationals had backtracked, such as over the premier's desire to invite controversial cancer therapist Milan Brych to practice medicine in Queensland. (Brych was later jailed in the United States for medical fraud.)

For the most part, however, the Liberals acted not so much as a brake on the government, but as a moderating image for it in the way it was presented to the public. This was of great benefit to the Nationals. As Henry Reynolds put it in *Australian Society* in February 1989, "the Liberal Party delivered up the middle class vote, and often the middle ground as well, to the National Party".

The presence of the Liberals allowed many urban middle-class voters to vote for the system without actually casting a ballot for the Nationals. This electoral benefit to the Nationals has in no way diminished since the demise of the coalition. The Nationals won both the 1983 and the 1986 elections courtesy of Liberal party preferences. In 1986 sixteen seats in the south-east corner of the state were delivered to the Nationals on the basis of Liberal preferences.

The Liberals liked being part of the action and so they went along with their senior partners. The Liberal parliamentary wing was slow, for example, to take seriously the issue of public accountability, as contained in the party's platform. This was despite agitations from the Young Liberal organisation and the activities...
of a number of backbenchers who pressed for the establishment of a parliamentary public accounts committee. Such activity was seen by the party's senior parliamentarians, however, as disrupting coalition relations rather than improving the process of government and thus protecting the public interest. The parliamentary Liberals were predominantly interested in remaining part of the ruling elite; they had no interest in forfeiting the generous trappings of office. As Terry White described the situation in 1983, for these people the "smell of ministerial leather was a powerful aphrodisiac".

After 1983 the Liberals did not adjust easily to life outside coalition. True to form, they preferred to believe that it was simply a matter of time before they were recalled. As Liberal leader Sir William Knox explained to the party's 1986 state convention, Queenslanders were "ready to breathe fresh Liberal life and good sense back into the State" (Courier-Mail, 9 June 1986). The Nationals, on the other hand, had other ideas. To them the Liberals were unsure of their priorities and had been a disruptive and limiting influence when in coalition. They were no longer needed, as the 1986 election confirmed. The Liberal party faced a new version of its old dilemma: if it pushed for a conservative identity of its own, it risked incurring the wrath of the Nationals and potential electoral annihilation; but if it supported the Nationals it would be portrayed by Labor as indistinguishable from them.

The Liberals attempted in the 1986 state campaign to overcome their tactical dilemma by promising a return to trust and integrity in government. The strategy backfired. The Labor party's advertisements scoffed at such rhetoric, pointing out that more than a dozen ex-Liberals were running as National party candidates in that election and questioning the strength of the Liberal party's stand on issues such as electoral reform. The Nationals, if anything, were even more contemptuous toward their former partners. The premier threatened a second election rather than a return to the instability of a coalition. On the other hand Russ Hinze, in a not too subtle reference to the years of coalition government, said: "Let me tell you that you can't be married for 26 years, jump out of bed, start wearing white and pretend to the
world you're a virgin. Think about it - that's the Liberal history, that's the Liberal story" (Courier-Mail, 25 September 1986).

A docile media

The abuse of political power in Queensland has not often been curbed by the media. There has been a reluctance, especially by the press, to criticise the excesses of the government. In practice this meant an unwillingness to challenge the government's assumption that what was good for it was automatically good for Queensland. The need for the media to adopt a more critical role has been vital, given the inability of the Opposition or the parliament in general to ensure any government accountability.

There have been exceptions to the media's inadequacy. After an initial story the new editor of the Courier-Mail backed journalist Phil Dickie in his investigations into gambling and prostitution racket and police corruption. The series of articles he wrote, together with the ABC's Four Corners programme "The Moonlight State", led to the establishment of the Fitzgerald Inquiry. Yet the revelations of corruption and vice in evidence before the inquiry raise the question of why the media in Queensland failed for so long to probe such issues systematically.

Over the years a number of isolated attempts had been made by individuals or particular programmes to investigate different aspects of the state's institutional workings, or to arouse public interest in such matters. The government's response, however, was to stonewall such inquiries, usually by pretending that no allegations had even been made. The premier, Joh Bjelke-Petersen, asked on one occasion to explain his reaction to a Four Corners report critical of his government, declined on the basis that he had "no respect for Four Corners".

The ABC has been the only media outlet consistently to have been critical of the Queensland government. This is significant, because, being a nationally based broadcaster administered from Sydney, it was the one media organisation not vulnerable to the informal sanctions which it might be feared the state government could apply against locally owned or locally administered media organisations. The only stick the state government could wield
against the ABC was a defamation action. (When pursued, these actions were invariably taxpayer-funded.)

The media must accept its share of the blame for the situation in which the government, with apparent impunity, was able to dismiss critical opinion. Perhaps the media perceived no need to adopt a critical perspective. The state’s media institutions were, after all, an established part of Queensland society, conservative in outlook. They probably also shared the government’s view that the important public issues were those which related to economic growth and development. While they may have regarded the government’s style at times as raw, they saw its priorities as essentially sound and, in any case, preferable to the Opposition. For every state election between 1957 and 1986, for example, the *Courier-Mail* endorsed the return of a coalition government. That it did so in 1986 is especially noteworthy, suggesting that the newspaper subscribed to the Liberal party’s own view of its moderating role in a coalition government. It is true that the ALP was often regarded by the community as unfit to govern, but in any case the impression prevailed that the government’s position was unassailable.

If the media understood the government - or thought it did - the government also understood the media. In particular the Nationals, both party organisation and government, recognised that despite Queensland’s supposedly decentralised character the major source of news throughout the state was provided, literally from under the one roof, by the *Courier-Mail* and Australian Associated Press (AAP). Just as importantly, the Nationals understood how regional news outlets, whose staff resources were often stretched, dealt with incoming news. The government recognised the significant advantage of presenting a press release in a form which could be used as it was, without editorial input. In addition to providing a press secretary for each minister, the government spent considerable public resources developing a well-staffed Public Relations Bureau inside the Premier’s Department. The role of this bureau was to propagate the government’s message, on film, over the airwaves, and in the press.

While the Nationals as a party learnt how to deal with the media, Joh Bjelke-Petersen as a politician learnt how to exploit it. He
was assisted in this over a number of years by his press secretary Allen Callaghan, a former ABC journalist. Callaghan is attributed with developing Bjelke-Petersen's media skills, and with selling to Sir Joh the notion of having a significant public relations infrastructure for propaganda purposes. Callaghan also taught Bjelke-Petersen how to deal with the media on his own terms. The premier developed an awareness that, as leader of the government, he was able to control the news flow, and that journalists needed him as much as he did them. Referring to them as his chooks, he fed them regularly, either at press conferences or individually in exclusive interviews. The journalists might not always have liked the premier's style, but they invariably appreciated gaining access to him.

The effect of the Nationals' canny understanding of the media and the government's large investment in its own media infrastructure was that news coverage of government activities was invariably extensive and usually tame.

The state government also realised that it was the largest employer of journalists in Queensland and that there were only limited career opportunities for a Queensland-grown journalist who wished to pursue a career within the state. The state government offered not only the majority of jobs in the Queensland media, but also many of the better-paid ones. For example, the 1988 salary package of a ministerial press secretary in Queensland is at least equivalent to, and often more than, that received by the top reporters at the Courier-Mail.

The customary point of entry into journalism is as a cadet reporter for a provincial or metropolitan newspaper, or a radio or television outlet. Career advancement may be slow, however, and so "fast-track" access to much higher salaried posts inside the government is often very attractive. Most people who have been ministerial press secretaries in recent years have come to their jobs from lower-paid positions elsewhere in the state. Many were appointed simply on the basis of a ministerial nod, without public advertisement of the position. And even when formal selection processes have been used, a preferred candidate has often been approached in advance, thereby undermining the purpose of such processes. In other words, while it might have been expected that
the generous salaries available to press secretaries may have attracted interstate candidates, the usual intention was to attract a known local or, at the very least, a person from elsewhere with a locally known reputation. And with the state government being such a large employer of journalists and the structure of the Queensland media so centralised, there has been (and remains) a risk that the members of the media might view themselves as part of the system, and not so much as observers of it.

The government has marshalled all the resources at its disposal to blunt criticism. It has threatened to sue its critics in order to silence or subdue them. For example, public money was used to pursue defamation actions against senior Labor figures Neville Warburton and Tom Burns who, in the mid 1980s, accused the state government of corruption. Verbal intimidation was also practised on those "chooks" who were regarded as excessively aggressive in questioning the premier or ministers. Sometimes, too, Bjelke-Petersen's behaviour at press conferences suggested that he was less than convinced of the value of such occasions if ever the focus changed from lecture to inquisition. One of the more celebrated examples occurred at a media briefing in June 1977 when Joh Bjelke-Petersen told a reporter to "go jump in the lake". Irritated by the persistent line of questioning over an alleged bashing at the Fortitude Valley police station the premier expostulated "I'm not here to be interrogated, fella. You can go jump in the lake. For goodness sake accept what I say. I'm not here to be cross-examined. You're just looking for a story. I've always treated you fellows pretty fairly - don't push your luck" (Courier-Mail, 7 June 1977).

In 1988 the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (ABT) was told that, several years beforehand, National party stalwart Sir Edward Lyons offered government media work to Tripod Television Pty Ltd. Sir Edward allegedly tried to dissuade the principals of Tripod (Des Power and John Barton) from running a story on Channel 9's Today Tonight about Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen's alleged low-interest loan-raising activities in Japan. Power was the executive producer of Today Tonight, and Barton the presenter. Lyons told the ABT there was no basis to the story. Power and Barton alleged that Lyons, in his effort to dissuade them from
proceeding with it, indicated they might receive substantial government work in the future. Lyons denied before the ABT that he had ever made such a suggestion. The loan-raising story itself, which was broadcast by *Today Tonight* in February 1983, was later the subject of an out-of-court $400,000 payment by the Bond Corporation (not long after it acquired QTQ 9) to Bjelke-Petersen.

Other aspects of that $400,000 payment were revealed in 1988 and 1989. In particular, the ABT ruled on 7 April 1989 that the payment itself was improper, as were Bond's attempts to conceal the amount, by offering a split payment of $50,000 in cash and $350,000 in property or a non-repayable loan. The Tribunal also ruled that Bond and one of his senior executives, David Aspinall, had misled a previous Tribunal hearing. This arose from comments Bond made in an interview with Jana Wendt on Channel 9's *A Current Affair* on 21 January 1988 when he stated: "Certainly the premier [Bjelke-Petersen] made it under no doubt that if we were going to continue to do business successfully in Queensland, then he expected that matter to be resolved." Bond had attempted to explain the remarks, which contradicted statements he had made to a previous ABT hearing, as "a confusion of expression". The Tribunal did not find that explanation credible.

The $400,000 settlement may also haunt the Bond Corporation on another ground. History will probably show that Bond was wrong in accepting to have Sir Edward Lyons as deputy chairman of QTQ 9. At the time of his appointment Lyons was also chairman of the TAB. Significantly, *Today Tonight* and the *Courier-Mail* broke the story about Lyons's misuse of TAB funds for his own personal betting. The synergy of the hasty settlement of the defamation action by Bond and the axeing of *Today Tonight* must arouse scepticism regarding QTQ 9's stated reasons for dropping that programme.

For the most part, however, the Queensland media has been disinclined to confront the National party or the government. In that sense the media has complied with the demands of the regime. Some in the media went further than mere compliance, becoming almost adulatory in their treatment of their premier. This extended even to the point of sympathetically canvassing the
possibility of a Bjelke-Petersen dynasty, with one commercial television channel prepared to outlay a sum for exclusive rights to cover the wedding of Sir Joh’s son.

Media proprietors might seek to defend their behaviour over the years by pointing to what the Fitzgerald Inquiry has revealed to be the reality of doing big business successfully in Queensland, in particular, the necessity of enjoying the confidence of the government. But that is a poor defence, notwithstanding that there is always a tension when commercial objectives conflict with public interest requirements.

Criticism is a legitimate and essential ingredient in a healthy liberal democracy. For a long time in Queensland, however, the political environment has not made room for critical debate and the party (parties) of political Opposition and the media have failed the public in their responsibility to provide such a critical perspective. As a result there has been no serious attempt to articulate a "public interest" independent of that conveniently formulated by the government. In fact, significant elements of the media may even have come to believe that government interest did equate with public interest.
Cabinet dominates the political process in Queensland, as it does elsewhere in Australia. Together with the public service, it forms the executive arm of government. Cabinet determines both the flow and nature of the legislation coming before parliament as well as the economic and social regulation that the state government will impose. It is also the body effectively responsible for making the thousands of appointments each year to Queensland government and semi-government bodies. In a strict sense, under the system of responsible government it is the Executive Council - the body comprising the state’s governor, the premier and other ministers - which is formally responsible for such decisions. In practice, Executive Council’s role is mainly one of legitimization.

In one sense there is nothing unusual about the intense executive dominance of politics that occurs in Queensland. After all, it is a well-chronicled feature of governments based on the Westminster model. The phenomenon is attributable to the growth of modern political parties and their insistence upon party discipline, the increasing complexity and expanding range of government activity and, consequently, the reliance of governments and their ministers on public service advisers. In Queensland, however, executive dominance has been reinforced by the long-term absence of real political, constitutional and electoral restraints on the exercise of power.

Given the Queensland cabinet’s remarkable degree of authority, surprisingly little is known about how it operates. Public attention often focuses on the decisions it makes, or on the premier, or the reported influence or idiosyncrasies of particular ministers, but - probably because of the conventions of secrecy and solidarity
associated with cabinet’s decisions - rather less is known about its internal culture. The mystery surrounding the Queensland cabinet’s operations is heightened by the fact that there is no cabinet handbook for the northern state and, hence, no standardised procedures governing cabinet’s operations. However, the release of a Legislation Manual by the Premier’s Department just after the 1986 state election has brought some improvement to cabinet’s legislative deliberations.

The Queensland cabinet normally convenes weekly, on Monday mornings, although until recent years its meetings were held on Tuesdays whenever state parliament was not in session. The premier chairs the meeting which, in addition to the eighteen ministers, is also routinely attended by the cabinet secretary, an official drawn from the Premier’s Department. Significantly, ministers are flanked around the cabinet table in order of seniority, a longstanding convention which tends both to concentrate discussion toward one end of the room and continually to remind junior ministers of their station in proceedings. This seating arrangement may also present some practical difficulties. In early 1987, for example, one junior minister with hearing problems returned from cabinet and announced to his assembled senior departmental officers that he had no idea of the outcome of a cabinet submission he had introduced because he could not hear the discussion going on at the other end of the table. He then suggested that someone should telephone the cabinet secretary to find out what had happened.

Most meetings of cabinet take place in the state government’s Executive Building in Brisbane. Periodically, however, cabinet convenes in a location outside the metropolis. In all, some fifty cities and towns - including some of Queensland’s smallest and most remote - have hosted more than seventy country cabinet meetings since the Country-Liberal coalition assumed office in the late 1950s. During Sir Joh’s term of office these country meetings came to be dubbed "Joh Shows" or "Muppet Shows" because of the premier’s habit of parading his ministers and his assessment of their individual standings before the local party faithful. (A procedural aspect of the country cabinet meeting is that one minister is rostered by the premier not to attend. That person
remains in Brisbane as "cover", thus ensuring the continuity of government in the event of a calamity claiming the lives of the rest of cabinet.)

Country cabinet meetings have tended to be held as and when necessary in terms of the prevailing political climate. In most years there are between two and four meetings outside Brisbane. In the critical state election year of 1986, on the other hand, there were five, all conducted in electorally sensitive locations: Babinda, Gladstone, Atherton, Nambour, and Mackay. Indeed, the political benefits to be reaped from country meetings should not be underestimated in a large, decentralised, parochial state such as Queensland. The occasions allow cabinet to be seen as sensitive to the prevailing mood of its own grassroots. This was an obvious consideration in the decision to hold one of the first country meetings after Sir Joh's resignation in the south-western town of Goondiwindi, in the party's heartland. A likely benefit for the local community when cabinet comes to town is the injection of new or upgraded capital works into the town or region. This can be very helpful if, as with cabinet's February 1985 meeting in Rockhampton and its June 1988 meeting at the Gold Coast, a state by-election is in the offing. It was also not fortuitous that during the years of coalition government the location of country cabinet meetings tended to favour the Nationals over the Liberals.

Preparing for cabinet

Ministers who wish to lodge submissions for the following week's cabinet meeting are required to do so, with the cabinet secretary, by 5 pm on the Thursday beforehand, although papers received on the Friday morning are sometimes also accepted. Because there is no cabinet handbook there are no standard guidelines for the framing of all categories of cabinet submissions.

As mentioned earlier, however, submissions with legislative implications are now covered by the Legislation Manual produced by the Premier's Department. Before November 1986, when the manual came into use, guidelines for cabinet submissions with legislative implications were periodically circulated by the cabinet secretary.
A large volume of business is usually processed in a single meeting and the time available to deal with any single item is extremely limited. Most ministers or, usually, their departments, therefore frame their submissions in an easily digestible form. The great majority are brief - only one or two pages in length. Even a matter of the most complex or contentious nature, and one which therefore may require lengthy supporting documentation, is usually accompanied by a brief executive summary.

The provision of executive summaries arose, curiously, in response to the practice of several cabinet ministers who, during the final two years of the Bjelke-Petersen premiership, periodically deluged the cabinet with voluminous, sometimes unintelligibly detailed submissions. These ministers, whose strategy was well understood by their public service advisers, believed their chances of securing cabinet approval for their documents were, in fact, assisted by overwhelming the cabinet meeting in this manner. The assumption was that other, more junior ministers would be so bombarded by the paperwork as not to bother to examine it in detail, leaving the "running" in cabinet to the minister concerned and the premier. As a means of manipulating cabinet, it is significant that these ministers felt so confident of their own positions, the premier's views and cabinet's likely reaction to their proposals.

The cabinet secretary numbers each cabinet submission according to its numerical order of submission. Each submission is also allocated a security classification on a scale of A to D, where A covers those which are "Secret", B "Restricted", and C "Confidential"; D is for papers which are to be more widely available. Each copy of each submission is also numbered, a practice designed to protect security. The first and second copies are assigned to the governor and premier, respectively, and other copy numbers are allocated to ministers in order of their seniority and, up until the mid 1980s, to a small number of senior public servants. Once the numbering is completed the process of distributing the papers for the cabinet meeting commences. A locked cabinet bag containing the papers is delivered to each minister usually around mid-afternoon on the Friday.
The cabinet bag, nowadays a large brown briefcase (made to order in Queensland, it is understood, by inmates of the state's prisons), includes the formal collective minutes of cabinet's previous meeting, the agenda for the next, and all cabinet submissions other than those which have been rated classification A by their sponsoring ministers. The latter, in many cases, are only tabled at the cabinet meeting itself. Significantly, the collective minutes of the previous cabinet meeting exclude reference to the decisions reached at that meeting. They merely contain details in each case of the submission number, the name of the sponsoring minister, and a cross-reference, using a separate numbering sequence, to the record of cabinet decisions. A list of the decisions of each meeting is circulated separately by the cabinet secretary to all ministers within a day or so of the meeting.

Until July 1984 each minister was reasonably free to consult his or her public service advisers about the contents of various submissions. Senior departmental officials were thus reasonably well acquainted with developments occurring throughout the government. However, as a result of concern about possible security lapses involving cabinet papers, a remarkable edict was invoked in July 1984 to the effect that cabinet submissions would no longer be made available to public service departmental heads, while ministers were expressly directed not to divulge the contents of the bag to their officials. The only exceptions to this ruling were the respective permanent heads of the central agencies (all under the premier's umbrella): the coordinator-general of the Premier's Department, the under treasurer, and the chairman of the Public Service Board. Those individuals themselves were issued with extremely tight guidelines concerning their access to, and circulation of, the information.

The July 1984 directive was neither good for the processes of cabinet decision-making nor practical. In the first place, details of the instruction itself, as well as the cabinet discussion of the issue, were leaked. At a more serious level, the directive appeared designed to inhibit the opportunities of ministers to offer informed comments in cabinet on proposals which might affect their portfolios. This is despite the fact that our system of responsible
government is one which, in modern terms, requires ministers to rely on the expertise of public officials.

Preventing individual ministers from consulting with their officials on matters brought to cabinet by other ministers is impractical, if only because it works against both ministerial and public service self-interest. Not surprisingly, the 1984 directive was viewed as potentially reducing cabinet's deliberative capacity, concentrating authority in the hands of the then premier and his deputy, and institutionalising a system of near-monopolistic reliance for advice on the premier's own central agency permanent heads. The pronouncement was widely interpreted as a lack of confidence by the premier in his ministers; a lack of trust in the public service; and a naked attempt by the Premier's Department to exclude other agencies from deliberations on important matters.

The new system for distributing cabinet documents did not work and, although never formally abandoned, it had ceased to operate long before Bjelke-Petersen's resignation. Although the Ahern government has had its own irritations with leaked cabinet documents, ministers have not been required to restrict in any particular way access to their cabinet bags. These arrangements vary considerably from minister to minister. Some ministers only share the cabinet bag with their press secretary; one minister even explained that this was so that the press secretary could vet the bag for any press or publicity opportunities for the minister! Most ministers, however, tend to distribute the cabinet bag, according to their own advisory requirements, to their public service chief executives and either their press secretary or private secretary. Some ministers may not even care to see what is in the cabinet bag until their own departmental briefing sessions on the morning of cabinet.

A cabinet meeting is preceded by the premier's personal briefing session, in which the premier is briefed on the agenda for the meeting and alerted to any potentially difficult issues. In Sir Joh's day this session was attended by the permanent head of the Premier's Department as well as by the premier's personal pilot and close confidante Beryl Young, who was also chief of the state government's air wing. Three other senior public servants - the chairman of the Public Service Board, the coordinator-general and
the under treasurer - attended as required, as did the premier's press secretary. Except for Beryl Young, the composition of the group was unremarkable. But her attendance and status at such gatherings was indicative of her standing as one of the premier's informal "kitchen cabinet", which also included Sir Edward ("top level Ted") Lyons. Nor was Young's attendance at these sessions the only conspicuous example of her influential role: on at least one occasion she was among members of the Queensland entourage attending the annual Premiers' Conference in Canberra.

Mike Ahern has used the pre-cabinet briefings in a different way. On the morning of cabinet, and before the briefing session itself, he and party president Sir Robert Sparkes customarily discuss by telephone important matters coming before cabinet that day. This is extremely significant, indicating a formal link between the parliamentary and organisational wings of the party in the handling of the government's business.

Between that discussion with the party state president and the pre-cabinet briefing, Ahern chairs what is termed inside the Premier's Department as a meeting of his personal staff. In fact, that is not quite accurate. True, the session is usually attended by three public servants: Peter Hall (the premier's senior press secretary), Gary Diggles (senior private secretary) and Fin McKeanie (director of corporate public relations). In addition, and more often than not, two other people attend: Ken Crooke, the National party's state director, and Bob Baudino, a public relations expert who was hired by the state government as a consultant on a part-time basis in 1988. Although never publicly identified as such, Baudino's role - in terms of his previous experience as a strategist with the federal Liberal party - is widely regarded as a political one. And while it is understood that this meeting does not discuss the contents of the cabinet bag, it may deal with certain cabinet items as well as other strategic issues or political problems facing the premier in the week ahead. Moreover, Ken Crooke's attendance at these meetings provides further evidence of the blurring of roles between party and government.

The pre-cabinet briefing then takes place, usually lasting for just under an hour, and attended by the premier, his deputy Bill Gunn, Finance minister Brian Austin, Peter Hall, and two other public
servants - the director-general of the Premier's Department Erik Finger, and under treasurer John Hall. The session is mainly devoted to the day's cabinet submissions which are read out in numerical order and discussed only if there is a point of special interest or concern. A helpful device used in this session, and later in the full cabinet meeting, is the *billet doux*. Literally translated as a love letter, a *billet doux* in the cabinet context is a short note attached either by the Premier's Department or by Treasury to any submission which may carry significant financial implications, or implications for government policy. It facilitates the treatment of submissions and allows the premier, his senior ministers and their central agencies (Premier's Department and Treasury) to keep some check on matters being presented to cabinet by outlying departments.

**The proceedings of cabinet**

The cabinet secretary has an important role in organising the business of the cabinet meeting and recording its deliberations. It is now known that two types of records are kept: the cabinet secretary's detailed handwritten notes of each meeting, and the collective minutes the cabinet secretary draws up after the meeting for circulation to ministers. Until very recently it was not known, even by many cabinet ministers, that the first kind of notes were retained. But apparently they have been, at least for a number of years. For example, the cabinet secretary's detailed notes of cabinet's 10 December 1984 meeting were tendered as exhibit No. 1773 at the Fitzgerald Inquiry on 14 November 1988. As fate would have it, that meeting was chaired not by Joh Bjelke-Petersen but by the deputy premier, Bill Gunn, and the discussion reportedly was more freewheeling than normal. The notes of the meeting are revealing, particularly in relation to the strong influence of Sir Robert Sparkes on proceedings, and the dominant role of senior ministers in the deliberations. In fact, about half the members of cabinet appeared to make no real contribution to the discussion.

Bill Gunn opened the discussion of that 1984 meeting by indicating, somewhat ironically given later events, that "Sparkes wants Inquiry into Police - going to be articles in press this week".
But Sir Robert's influence was not confined to matters of high policy: Bill Gunn later reportedly told cabinet that Sparkes was "uptight re Hurrey", presumably a reference to a "child sex" scandal which was to lead to the criminal conviction of well-known radio personality Bill Hurrey. The tone of these notes also reveals a distinct earthiness in the contributions of some ministers, particularly when social and moral issues were being discussed. By coincidence, the cabinet secretary's detailed notes of the same meeting reveal that cabinet was briefed by the attorney-general, Neville Harper, on the problem of illegal casinos in Brisbane. This was in direct contradiction to the government's strident public denials at the time of the existence of such establishments.

The second type of record of cabinet's discussions, the collective minutes of proceedings, are drawn up by the cabinet secretary following each meeting. They include details of attendance, a sanitised version of any debates, and details of the outcome of cabinet's consideration of each submission discussed at the meeting. These collective minutes are then circulated to ministers along with the paperwork for the next meeting of cabinet, where they are confirmed.

Cabinet's business at the meeting is divided into three major segments: the circulation of Executive Council minutes (ECMs) for the Executive Council meeting on the following Thursday; the consideration of individual cabinet submissions and, where necessary, the reconsideration of deferred submissions; and oral matters. The Bjelke-Petersen cabinet dealt with the ECMs first, then moved to oral matters and finally individual cabinet submissions. Mike Ahern reshuffled the order of proceedings, his cabinet dealing first with cabinet submissions held over from the previous meeting, then new submissions and then the ECMs. Oral matters are dealt with lastly by Ahern, and usually in conjunction with formalities, such as the handling of invitations.

Although timetabled differently, the treatment of ECMs in the Ahern cabinet is similar to that which prevailed during Sir Joh's premiership. In order of seniority each minister is given a turn to lead in the presentation of ECMs. Other ministers then present their ECMs - once again, however, always in seniority order.
Most ECMs are brief, with pertaining information usually contained in an ECM folder as an accompanying schedule. For example, an ECM relating to a public service appointment will be accompanied by a schedule detailing other applications received for the position, as well as a résumé of the proposed appointee. The contents of many ECMs are cleared beforehand, either by the premier or other relevant ministers and, since 1988, by the relevant cabinet committee. While many ECMs are endorsed almost automatically, ministers over the years have tended to focus on those ECMs containing recommendations for public service or statutory authorities' appointments. In recent years there have been a great many of these, given that all public service promotions and appointments at Grade 1-15 and above (any position over about $48,000 in 1989 annual salary terms), and all similar police recommendations above the rank of senior sergeant, require cabinet and Executive Council endorsement. Nor has it been uncommon for cabinet to overturn police or departmental recommendations for appointment. For his part, Ahern has allowed certain of the less contentious appointments to be determined at ministerial level and go directly to Executive Council without being first considered by the full cabinet.

Cabinet may deal with as many as 120 ECMs in one meeting. Considering that all ministers must initial every minute, the deliberations are somewhat jumbled and unsatisfactory. This is because a minister's presentation of any ECM coincides with everybody else frantically initialling the already approved ECMs circulating around the cabinet table. The paperwork is so considerable that each minister is provided with a side-table on which to place his or her cabinet bag.

Over the years, and particularly during the latter stages of Bjelke-Petersen’s premiership, it has been during this segment of the cabinet meeting that petty rivalries among ministers have most often been displayed: this is probably because of the opportunity ministers have to query and upstage their colleagues in front of the premier. In other words, much of the debate relates to personality more than to policy. For example, it was during cabinet discussion of an ECM - a proposal for, of all things, local government subdivisional changes - that one of the more celebrated ministerial
clashes in recent years occurred. It took place on 12 August 1985. The combatants were two of cabinet’s more senior and able ministers - Russ Hinze and Don Lane. Interestingly though, their clash related not so much to the substance of the proposal under discussion as to Hinze’s aside that Lane, as an ex-Liberal, should have better understood a particular aspect of the matter. Lane took the greatest offence at this reminder of his Liberal past, which was also not the first time his memory had been jogged in the cabinet room by Hinze. In what were described by others who were present as the "most colourful terms", Lane warned Hinze never to do it again, at which point the premier interceded to restore order.

Announcements arising from cabinet’s endorsement of ECMs are made only after the papers have been signed by the governor at the Executive Council meeting on the following Thursday. Until the late 1980s a minister in exceptional circumstances might have been given clearance by cabinet to take an individual ECM straight to the governor following the cabinet meeting; this procedure was known as the "flying minute". As governor, Sir Walter Campbell has discontinued this practice. Under new arrangements ministers may request a special meeting of the Executive Council to approve an urgent matter. If the governor agrees to the request any such meeting requires the attendance of at least two ministers.

Sir Walter’s action to amend these procedures was probably inspired by those occasions in the past when matters contained in ECMs had been made public before the Executive Council’s meeting, meaning the governor was presented with an invariably unappreciated fact accompli. Indeed, there had been occasions when the governor of the day had been so displeased with such lapses that he had reportedly refused to sign ECMs containing appointments which had been announced in advance; the most dramatic was the proposed appointment of former cabinet minister Tom Newbery as Queensland’s agent-general in London. In June 1986 Sir Walter Campbell, not many months after moving to Government House, sought to bring such practices to an end. Through the premier he requested from cabinet, and was given, an undertaking that henceforth he would be provided with more details about the appointments to statutory bodies and authorities.
that required Executive Council's approval. On other occasions Sir Walter has called ministers to Government House to have them explain ECMs, in the process also making clear to the cabinet collectively that the office of governor should not be regarded merely as a rubber stamp. In his final days as premier even Sir Joh must have absorbed that message, Sir Walter choosing to interpret the National parliamentary party's leadership crisis as political and therefore capable of resolution by parliamentary means, rather than constitutional and therefore requiring the governor's intervention.

Whereas the discussion of ECMs affords the best opportunity inside the cabinet room for individual ministers to ventilate their personal rivalries, the time devoted to oral matters allows the premier to exert his personal control over the cabinet as a group. Once again in order of their seniority, ministers are invited to bring forward matters of specific or general interest. The discussion tends to be free-ranging and sometimes disjointed, but there is no doubt that it is the most significant element of the cabinet meeting in terms both of hard politics and the internal powerplays of the cabinet. It was in these discussions that Sir Joh was at his best. As the most senior minister he led off, often meandering over a large number of issues, or demanding explanations of different ministers; during this time he employed all of his considerable skills to bring errant ministers into line and to maintain his close and firm control over the cabinet as a whole.

It was during a cabinet discussion of oral matters in December 1985, for example, that the premier severely lectured Education minister Lin Powell for allegedly violating cabinet solidarity; the allegation was that Powell publicly supported tourist operators who opposed new legislation regulating public access to Fraser Island. Powell reportedly described certain aspects of the legislation as "just plain dumb" (Courier-Mail, 18 December 1985). Yet Sir Joh was not nearly so bullying with senior ministers as he was on this occasion with Powell. Although the premier periodically threatened Russ Hinze over his skirmishes with Sir Edward Lyons, he did so usually in media interviews rather than in the cabinet room. On more than one occasion the "please explain"
issued to Hinze by the premier in a news conference or press interview came to nothing in the subsequent cabinet meeting.

It did not take Mike Ahern long as premier to realise the importance of the oral matters segment of the cabinet meeting. Most notably, he used it to cement his government's support for the Fitzgerald Inquiry, in particular, by swiftly acceding to any requests from the inquiry for an extension of its terms of reference. Like his predecessors, Ahern has used this time to air political problems facing the state government, such as the federal referendum campaign in the latter half of 1988 and, occasionally, to criticise the performance of individual ministers. Early in his premiership, for instance, he issued a stiff reprimand to Bob Katter Jnr for allegedly failing to arrive on time and in time to deliver the eulogy at the north Queensland funeral of a former cabinet minister. Katter had been designated as the state government's senior representative at the ceremony.

Unlike the order of discussion of both ECMs and oral matters, individual cabinet submissions are considered in the order in which they were submitted. While the discussion of any submission has always been largely a dialogue between the relevant minister and the premier (who has in front of him the billet doux containing the comments of his own department and that of Treasury), this feature has been underlined in recent years. Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen preferred cabinet meetings to be finished by 1 pm whereas Sir Frank Nicklin's cabinet often remained in session all day. Mike Ahern also prefers the cabinet meeting to be finished by lunchtime, though with his administration a good deal of the detailed work is left to separate meetings of the various cabinet committees. Cabinet therefore has very limited time in which to transact its business; ministers have neither a great deal of time to examine the submissions of others, nor do they tend to do so unless departmental rivalries are involved. In any case, the real pressure on ministers in terms of their individual cabinet submissions is applied not in cabinet, but in the parliamentary party room and, since Ahern's accession, in the cabinet committees.

Proposals for new or amended legislation, or other items which are legislatively related, make up the bulk of such cabinet submissions. The process for dealing with them nowadays comprises two
stages. A minister initially requests cabinet permission to develop a particular legislative initiative; if approved, the minister then prepares draft legislation together with supporting documentation for cabinet discussion.

Above all, it must be understood that the mode of cabinet discussions is essentially reactive, that deliberations are limited, and that discussions are dominated by the premier and senior ministers. The way cabinet uses its time sometimes reveals interesting policy priorities. For example, cabinet has been known to spend fifteen or twenty minutes discussing the kangaroo cull or the dingo protection fence, yet only twenty or thirty seconds on a major town plan.

Ministerial responsibility "Queensland style"

Although state cabinet is the body which makes government policy and drafts the government's legislative programme, its decisions are more the product of check-points and influences operating outside the cabinet room than a reflection of rigorous deliberation within it. This is not a situation peculiar to Queensland, although the almost complete absence of institutional restraints on the exercise of government power in the state has produced its own peculiarities.

The style of ministerial accountability which applies in Queensland has evolved over the long period in which the Nationals have been the party in power. The pressures on individual ministers and the collective cabinet have not been those applied externally by the parliament or caused by concern of electoral defeat, but by mechanisms and influences within the party and government. Ministers do not take long to appreciate the position: they know that to succeed they must be able to cultivate backbench support and earn the confidence of their parliamentary leader, the party organisation and, preferably, the industry and professional groups relevant to their portfolios.

Quite apart from the National party organisation's own policy development committees (examined in chapter 6), there are two sets of committee mechanisms which exist to assist and advise the parliamentary party in government. The first of these is the min-
The ministerial (or government party) committee structure was developed during the 1970s. These committees provide political advice and assistance to individual ministers both in the party room and the parliament, and to the government collectively in the parliament. A separate committee exists for each of the eighteen ministries. Their importance varies according to the portfolio, the personal style of the minister, and the interests and commitment of committee members. This variability of importance was particularly pronounced in the days of coalition government when the political priorities of the Nationals and the Liberals often diverged - a factor which tended to be reflected in the composition of the committees. For example, National party MLAs tended to dominate the memberships of those ministerial committees dealing with public works and housing, mines and energy, primary industry, and lands, forestry and water resources; Liberals predominated in such portfolios as justice and education.

The membership of these ministerial committees is formally orchestrated by the cabinet secretary. Individual backbench MLAs may nominate themselves, or selective approaches may be made by individual ministers to backbenchers of their choice. Membership of the committees is then finalised at cabinet. The number of members per committee averages about eight (excluding the minister), and most backbenchers are allocated to about four different committees.

The way in which the ministerial committees operate depends, above all, on the attitude of the premier, and also, of individual ministers. Joh Bjelke-Petersen was comfortable with them. He preferred to have a generalised knowledge of issues, leaving the details for ministers to defend. Ministers who are more able or experienced, or who cope easily with detail, might use their committees sparingly. During Mike Ahern’s first year as premier, for example, he convened his ministerial committee on only one occasion, while Brian Austin - when he was Health minister - only convened his committee to discuss legislation which was already in draft form. New ministers, on the other hand, sometimes use their
committees as political crutches, relying heavily on the party’s backbenchers for policy ideas and thus requiring weekly meetings during parliamentary sessions in order to assist with the drafting of legislation or policy statements. Some ministers even establish sub-committees of their ministerial committees to work specifically on legislation.

Vince Lester has used his ministerial committee meetings to discuss sensitive issues. Even as a relatively senior and experienced minister, he convened his committee weekly whenever parliament was in session. The minister’s chief public service officials and political advisers also were often invited to attend. Backbenchers warmed to this approach; they felt they were being involved in the government’s decision-making, whether the issue was a major crisis, such as the 1988 Queen Street construction site accident in Brisbane, or one of local interest, such as the issue of a permit for a suburban flea market. This style of operation for the committee suited Lester’s temperament, and also allowed him to cultivate the party-room support he might need some time in the future, for example, if the parliamentary leadership or deputy leadership became vacant.

Not all ministers have recognised the benefits of using their ministerial committees effectively. Lin Powell, when Education minister, developed an Education ministerial committee the composition of which was regarded by many within the National party backbench as incestuous. After the 1983 state election, for example, its members were almost entirely new members of parliament who were also ex-schoolteachers. The committee’s advice may have been technically proficient, but it was politically less experienced.

The ways ministers cultivate backbench support also vary. For some, the example they set of talent or sheer hard work is enough. Others attempt to curry favour by hinting at future opportunities for elevation to the ministry. Before the Fitzgerald Inquiry, too, generous amounts of government-paid travel and ministerial hospitality, all courtesy of the public purse, were always available. There is also another blunt means of attracting backbench support, one available and long-used by ministers whose portfolios cover public works or other means of capital injection. Euphemistically
referred to by backbenchers as "political" activity, this is the practice traditionally regarded as one of the spoils of office - of "pumping largesse" into "deserving areas". When asked to clarify the term "political" in this context, one backbencher responded: "You know what political is. Political is when you have to spend a million dollars in a marginal seat to save it."

It is not surprising that some effort is put into forming these committees. They are important for ministers and backbenchers alike. Ministers, in addition to cultivating support, may need people to back them in order to sustain their position in the party room or on the floor of the House. In a more general sense, the committee members can be used by a minister as barometers of the mood of the party room or the general public regarding either the minister's own performance or particular issues of the day. Most importantly, the ministerial committees help to keep backbenchers busy and, thus, their energies directed to the good of the party.

There are also significant advantages for committee members, apart from the self-indulgent benefits of travel and hospitality already mentioned. Backbenchers often use their ministerial committee involvement to tailor their professional political ambitions or to do something special in an emerging field of political interest. There is the chance that a member will be noticed in the party room or the parliament or National party headquarters as a proficient operator and thus attract attention when cabinet vacancies occur. Speaking privileges in parliament are accorded committee members when relevant legislation is being considered. These opportunities for committee members to display their talents should not be underestimated in a parliamentary party where the prospects of ministerial elevation are so good, at least by comparison with other states. In Queensland more than one-third of National parliamentarians in 1988 were ministers, and only five of all the National MLAs who at that time had sat in parliament longer than the previous five years had not been elevated to the ministry at some time or other.

Another significant aspect of the committees relates to their use of public service resources. Although the extent of public service involvement in ministerial committees varies from portfolio to
portfolio, and over time, it is not uncommon for both senior public servants as well as political staffers to attend and participate actively in these meetings as advisers. Involvement by public officials in such meetings is not peculiar to Queensland; but evidence over the years suggests that in some portfolios the demands placed on officials imply for them obligations of partisanship and personal ministerial protection.

The ministerial committees have thus come to play a significant supportive role in the execution of government business. It is none the less in the National parliamentary party room itself where, much more so than even in cabinet, real pressure is applied to cabinet ministers to account for their actions. Again, however, the ministerial committees perform a role: a minister who has briefed his or her committee on a controversial measure, and has the backbenchers committed to it, is infinitely better equipped to defend that position in the party room than a minister who has not taken that precaution.

The real significance of the National party parliamentary room is that, for some years now, it has come to be regarded as the de facto parliament, in the sense that this is where the real debate has occurred, where problems are aired and amendments to draft legislation made. This situation was confirmed on more than one occasion publicly by former minister Russ Hinze in his declaration that "the government is in the party room". Joh Bjelke-Petersen himself must have believed it to be the case, because it was he who was the first in Queensland to insist on collective ministerial responsibility being applied in the joint parties room (the name for the party room in the days of coalition).

While a practice not confined to Queensland, Bjelke-Petersen’s insistence on cabinet solidarity in the joint parties room was, to him, a practical response to a practical problem. In this case the "problem" was that his position was not always sustained by the joint parties. The matter came to a climax in 1978 over the issue of the sandmining of coloured sands at Cooloola, a little over one hundred kilometres north of Brisbane. Both the premier and state cabinet publicly supported the mining proposal, but there was widespread public disenchantment over the matter. At the time, Bjelke-Petersen promised to let the joint parties meeting finally
decide the issue. It did so, rejecting the position of the premier and the cabinet. This was the last time the premier left such a decision to the joint parties. Interestingly too, the Cooloola issue was the one and only issue during the Bjelke-Petersen premiership when a secret ballot was held by the joint parties. (This was one of many matters recorded in the detailed handwritten minutes of joint parties meetings which were kept over many years, a fact not known even by all who were involved.)

In particular, Joh Bjelke-Petersen quickly came to understand that his insistence upon collective ministerial responsibility in the joint parties room could both frustrate the Liberals and reduce their impact in the coalition. Because cabinet meetings normally preceded joint parties gatherings, Liberal ministers could choose either to support the cabinet line, which on a number of policy matters was contrary to Liberal policy, or risk their positions as ministers in the coalition arrangement. Indeed, any minister who failed to uphold the cabinet line in joint parties assuredly risked instant dismissal.

Tensions within the party room eased following the end of the coalition, but the advantages of continuing to enforce cabinet solidarity in that forum remain. A matter resolved by a tight margin in the cabinet (albeit that formal votes are rare there) has an excellent chance of gaining party room support provided that cabinet members toe the line.

The pressures upon ministers to be accountable for their activities, if only to their cabinet and party room colleagues, have intensified since Mike Ahern secured the premiership. It is not surprising that the new premier moved to streamline the cabinet process: he himself had sampled eight years as a minister of the Bjelke-Petersen cabinet and must have long realised cabinet's inadequacies as either a deliberative or decision-making body. To address the problem of work overload Ahern introduced a cabinet committee system. It comprises two senior policy committees - one dealing with economic policy and the other with the budget - and three ministerial planning committees (MPCs) - dealing, respectively, with resources, infrastructure and social issues. Each MPC reports to cabinet via the relevant senior policy committee. The cabinet committee network is also supported by an economic
advisory committee drawn from the private sector and chaired by a senior Queensland business identity.

Although it is still too early to assess the likely enduring impact of the cabinet committee system, there have been several immediate consequences. First, the committees have forced ministers, especially the newer and more junior ones, to come to grips with the details of their portfolios. Hitherto ministers had been able to elude this burden either because of the lack of time in full cabinet meetings to probe such details, or because of their reliance upon departmental officials or political advisers at ministerial committees. Under the new arrangements ministers have been forced to work harder on their paper-work. In Sir Joh's day cabinet deliberations of individual ministers' submissions often amounted to little more than a dialogue between minister and premier. Some of this business has now been removed from the full cabinet meeting, and is handled by one or other of the two senior policy committees. These committees have identical membership - Mike Ahern (premier and treasurer, in the chair), Brian Austin (Finance), Bill Gunn (deputy premier, Works and Housing), Vince Lester (Employment, Training and Industrial Affairs) and Neville Harper (Primary Industries).

Early signals suggest that the two senior committees are operating with some measure of success. They have overcome the initial resistance of the Treasury Department to their establishment and they allow for a more strategic approach to decision-making. They are, none the less, proving somewhat cumbersome in their operations. Decisions emerge very slowly, and some proposals have moved back and forth between the committees without being resolved. This should not be surprising, given that Ahern's personal style is deliberative - unlike that of his predecessor. His cabinet is mostly comprised of people who, as holdovers from the Bjelke-Petersen years, were unaccustomed to the new style of operation. Some people have made the adjustment, but others have not. For example, ministers uncomfortable with this more inquiring modus operandi may seek protective armour for themselves. At a single meeting of cabinet's Budget Committee held on 3 October 1988, three different ministers called before that
committee brought with them public servants to provide assistance; one minister even brought in six.

This difficulty of adjustment is also very apparent in examining the ministerial planning committees. One of these, the Infrastructure Committee chaired by Bill Gunn, simply has not functioned. It is uncertain whether it even met during its first year, although its area of responsibility was "shadowed" by a public service interdepartmental committee. Another MPC, that dealing with social issues, has been hamstrung by the repeated failure of certain of its members to attend the regularly convened meetings. Other factors, including ministerial and leadership rivalries, could explain the situation of either committee, but the point remains that neither has operated effectively.

The dominance of the premier in cabinet

Joh Bjelke-Petersen learnt well from his early political experiences. He was almost removed in the early stages of his premiership, but then went on to build for himself a formidable reputation. His position within his party remained invulnerable until his political judgment totally deserted him in 1987.

Although no successor could initially expect to match his authority, the position of premier does wield considerable power in both the cabinet and the party room. The premier chairs the cabinet and controls all cabinet processes and mechanisms, including the paperflow. This means, among other things, that the premier can put forward any item at all, even without warning. The National party premier in Queensland, like other conservative leaders elsewhere in Australia, also has the authority to appoint all members of the ministry, although in practice National party headquarters is likely to be closely involved in this procedure (as explained in chapter 6).

This authority carries with it a number of advantages for the premier. Appointees to cabinet presumably feel some indebtedness toward the parliamentary leader, while the large size of the Queensland cabinet (relative to the whole National parliamentary party) enables the premier to hold out reasonable promotion prospects to other backbenchers. That, in turn, inspires loyalty
within the parliamentary wing, while allowing the premier to maintain considerable pressure on ministers to perform and to conform. The pressure is applied by the processes of cabinet, as well as of its own committees, the party room, and the ministerial committees. Sometimes it is even applied publicly. New ministers, in particular, feel the burden. Bjelke-Petersen often reminded his new cabinet recruits that they were "on trial". The premier's authority is also underlined by the strong emphasis upon seniority which occurs in relation to almost every aspect of cabinet.

The strength of the premier's position also may be indicated by the manner in which decisions are reached and disputes resolved in cabinet. For the most part "active" decisions are not required; individual cabinet submissions or ECMs usually lead to only one course of action and, provided that this outcome has been cleared by the appropriate committee beforehand or checked with the premier if there is a doubt about it, most decisions slide through without great difficulty. Sometimes issues are contentious, yet the view of the premier, once stated, nearly always leads to a degree of resolution. At worst, the premier may defer a decision if he is concerned about the level of support for his position. For example, Sir Joh deferred the matter of a replacement for Sir Charles Wanstall as chief justice after a clash with his Liberal attorney-general. At a subsequent meeting the premier won the day, albeit that on this occasion all the Liberal cabinet members declined to sign the ECM containing the recommendation.

It has been only in rare circumstances that a formal vote of cabinet has been required. In the last fifteen years of the Bjelke-Petersen premiership there were no more than a handful of such occasions. These included the 13-1 vote of the cabinet in 1974 to join the Commonwealth government's Medibank programme (the premier's was the one opposing voice) and the almost equally overwhelming vote of state cabinet several years later against permitting cancer therapist Milan Brych to conduct a clinic in Queensland. Again Bjelke-Petersen was in the minority, while his position on the matter was subsequently discredited following Brych's conviction in California for fraud. On two other occasions, however, Sir Joh was able to secure his own preference through a formal vote. The first was in relation to the proposed location of
a power station at Tarong (a site adjacent to the premier’s own electorate), although the professional advice to cabinet, which was leaked to the press, strongly favoured an alternative site at Milmerran. The second matter pertained to the appointment of Sir Edward Lyons as chairman of the TAB. In each case, however, the formal vote was taken only after the differing opinions within the ministry had been thoroughly aired in the public arena. By contrast, there were two or three issues on which the Ahern ministry voted in its first year in office. None of these matters was publicly aired either beforehand or afterward, although it is understood that one of them related to the Fitzgerald Inquiry, and probably involved Sir Terence Lewis.

Occasions when the premier’s view has not prevailed in cabinet have not been common, and have been even less so since the demise of the coalition. Yet one fascinating incident did occur, albeit accidentally, at the cabinet meeting on 20 November 1984. Cabinet had before it a category A (secret) submission (No. 40214) recommending an enhanced role for the Public Service Board in the management of staff and financial resources within the public service. The premier was not at cabinet that day, although the acting premier (Bill Gunn) had been briefed by the Public Service Board on the submission’s contents. Gunn was prepared to let the matter proceed, despite the fact that the submission (presumably because of its security classification) had not been included in the cabinet bag, and thus was seen for the first time by ministers only when tabled at the cabinet meeting. In any event, cabinet approved the submission. Within a day or so, however, the premier returned, and received from his own department and from Treasury an opposing view to that which cabinet had reached on the matter. He thereupon instructed the decision to be changed so that its effect was reversed and, at the meeting the following week, reported his action. It is understood that not one cabinet minister responded - much less objected - to the premier’s action.

This was not the only issue on which Sir Joh forced his cabinet to somersault. About a year before the coalition collapsed a joint submission was made by ministers Bill Glasson (Lands), Bill Hewitt (Administrative Services) and Sam Doumany (Justice) to
establish a foreign land register. Despite the fact that the Liberal party already supported such a measure, and the National party organisation was moving in the same direction, the matter was dropped in cabinet on account of the premier’s strong opposition. A little later, while Joh Bjelke-Petersen was abroad, the same proposal reappeared on the cabinet agenda, although it was not clear which minister was responsible for this action. Some ministers were confused by the situation, while others presumed that the premier had softened his stance on the matter and was prepared for it to be proceeded with while he was away. Cabinet endorsed the submission. When informed of this action, however, Sir Joh was furious and, at the next cabinet meeting, the decision was reversed.

Attention so far has focused on the structure and processes of cabinet, on the dominant position of the premier, and on the parliamentary party environment within which the premier and the cabinet operate. One crucial factor remains to be discussed on this subject - the role and influence of the National party organisation and its long-time president, Sir Robert Sparkes.
The One-Party State

Although state cabinet may be the body responsible for the decisions of government, very little of consequence occurs there or elsewhere inside the Queensland government without the knowledge of the National party apparatus. Indeed, the snug relationship between the parliamentary and organisational wings over the years has been crucial to the broadening of the party’s electoral base. The Nationals were seen as a tightly run outfit, single-mindedly intent on advancing Queensland’s economic development. They were also committed to protecting Queensland from the political incursions of successive federal governments and its inhabitants from the threat to moral standards posed by the supposedly permissive policies of other governments.

A degree of natural tension did exist, however, between the parliamentary party and the organisational wing on matters of principle. For example, there has been intermittent tension over perceived attempts by the party organisation to intervene on policy issues, thereby laying the party open to the same charge levelled for many years against the ALP, namely, that non-elected party officials exerted undue control over elected members of the parliamentary party. A dispute arising from this matter of principle occurred fairly early in Robert Sparkes’s state presidency when, in 1973, an MLA (Don Neal) told the parliamentary party that he had been threatened with disendorsement if he did not abide by the decision of the state conference on a matter of land policy. Another example of such tension, and one which surfaced regularly during the 1980s, was the uneasiness which surrounded the intractability of the Bjelke-Petersen cabinet (in particular, the
The One-Party State

premier himself) in refusing to endorse the wish of successive party state conferences to introduce a foreign land register.

Tension within the party was usually contained to manageable levels, although Sir Joh did bridle periodically at reports suggesting the overbearing influence of party headquarters, in particular, the extent of authority of party president Sir Robert Sparkes. Significantly, when a total breakdown did occur between Bjelke-Petersen and the party organisation in 1987, it was the party organisation under Sir Robert which prevailed.

Sir Robert Sparkes

Sir Robert Sparkes became the president of the Queensland National (then Country) party in 1970. The son of former state parliamentarian and prosperous grazier and graingrower Sir James Sparkes, Sir Robert has combined his duties at the state party level with obligations in local government: since 1967 he has been chairman of the Wambo Shire Council on the Western Darling Downs.

According to a senior member of the National party Alan Metcalfe in his book *In Their Own Right*, Sparkes had known Joh Bjelke-Petersen from the early days when Bjelke-Petersen was an aerial-seeding contractor. However, it was not until 1970 that their alliance was formed when Sparkes intervened to contain party instability after a move in the party room against Bjelke-Petersen's leadership. In a bid to forestall the disunity Sparkes threatened with disendorsement any MLA who acted disloyally.

The authority which Sparkes wields in the National party is extraordinary. In part this is a tribute to his considerable tactical skill and the vast knowledge he possesses not only of his own party but also of almost every facet of Queensland politics. This knowledge enabled him, together with executive director Mike Evans and premier Bjelke-Petersen, to mastermind a political strategy to extend his party's electoral base; the success of that strategy led the Nationals ultimately to secure office in their own right.

As the party's stocks improved, Sparkes's political authority extended to the point where, even in the public mind, it rivalled
that of Bjelke-Petersen. Within the party Sir Robert’s position became impregnable; he has held the party presidency longer than any of his predecessors (the next longest-serving presidents were John Leahy from 1936 to 1944 and Alan Campbell 1944 to 1951), and not once in his first fifteen years as party state president did anyone even contest the post against him.

For the most part Sparkes preferred to keep out of the public gaze but his influence, observable or otherwise, has been pervasive. His name is frequently invoked by ministers in the cabinet room, particularly when they are seeking to persuade colleagues on a matter. His view of the state of the party or his assessment of problems is also conveyed regularly to cabinet. One instance, already mentioned, was when the acting premier opened a cabinet meeting by reporting that Sparkes wanted an inquiry into the police as there were going to be articles in the press about it that week. Sir Robert is fully conversant with important matters under consideration in the cabinet room. Although there is no evidence to suggest that he has ever received the cabinet bag, ministers often consult him for advice or seek his support for proposals. And while he may not receive the cabinet paperwork as such, a number of ministers believe that Sir Robert’s knowledge of cabinet discussions has been assisted over the years by the regular "pipelines" provided by certain ministers anxious to ingratiate themselves with him.

Sparkes’s detailed knowledge of what is occurring in both cabinet and the parliamentary party room has been assisted over recent years by the strategically placed presence in the Premier’s Department of Wendy Armstrong, a research officer who was formerly employed at National party headquarters. After joining the departmental staff, she maintained a close working relationship with Sir Robert while also coming to be regarded as one of the members of Sir Joh’s personal "kitchen cabinet". Armstrong, who remained with the Premier’s Department following Bjelke-Petersen’s demise, is employed as a contract public servant, but her role in the department is widely regarded as directly political. For example, according to Alan Metcalfe she was a member of the National party committee which laid down the final blueprint for their 1983 state election campaign strategy. Armstrong also vets
the draft policy statements emanating from the party's policy committees before these are forwarded to the party's State Management Committee. Nor is her work confined to the state sphere; she sometimes provides the federal National party with policy assistance.

Armstrong enjoys access to the contents of the cabinet bag and is the person to whom both government ministers and backbenchers turn for advice and assistance, especially when they are in trouble. She is not a card-carrying member of the National party, but she is of considerable strategic importance to Sir Robert Sparkes personally, and in the broader relations between the parliamentary and organisational wings of the party. This is underlined by the fact that Ms Armstrong is one of the very few outsiders who frequently attends as an observer the quarterly meetings of the Queensland National party's influential Central Council (see accompanying diagram for details of the state party's organisational structure).

Sir Robert's access to cabinet has also been formalised since Mike Ahern's elevation to the premiership; as mentioned earlier, Sparkes and Ahern routinely hold a telephone conversation on the morning of cabinet to discuss matters on its agenda. The call is scheduled even before the premier's own briefing session with his senior public service advisers.

Another facility which has enabled the parliamentary and organisational wings to remain close, and in particular which has allowed Sparkes to keep a watching brief over the government's performance, is the quarterly joint meeting of the parliamentary wing and the State Management Committee. This joint session, which is chaired by Sir Robert, provides a means for the government to report to the party organisation on a variety of issues. In fact, the premier delivers a "Government Report" to the party organisation at these meetings.

A number of examples over the years illustrate the extent of Sir Robert's impact on cabinet and the government. Apart from the assistance he lent Joh Bjelke-Petersen in his early years as premier, and which was referred to earlier, Sparkes intervened in 1978 to convince parliamentary members that the general public, in the wake of the Peel Report's disclosure of rorts involving
Structure of the National Party of Australia (Queensland). See Appendix G for description of the main organs.
MLAs' air travel entitlements, supported tighter controls over parliamentary travel. On other occasions he has intervened when cabinet has appeared to depart from or move beyond party policy on a matter. Most often, however, his intrusion has been in the interests of "damage control". It is believed that it was Sir Robert who convinced cabinet to acknowledge National party backbench and community feelings on the abortion issue by allowing a free vote on legislation coming before the Queensland parliament. And it was Sir Robert who, in the face of Sir Joh's open hostility, engineered a resolution of the 1986 Lindeman Island crisis which occurred when state cabinet revoked 390 hectares of national park on Lindeman Island in order to allow the land to be reverted to freehold. The government's intention was then to sell the land to East-West Airlines, headed in Queensland by the premier's confidant Sir Edward Lyons. Whereas Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen refused to reconsider the matter, the intervention of Sir Robert led to a tactical retreat by East-West.

Although it is the responsibility of the premier as parliamentary leader to determine the composition of the ministry, Sir Robert Sparkes is invariably consulted and his advice almost always heeded. The premier will judge ministerial contenders in terms of loyalty and, to a lesser extent, performance in the party room and in the parliament. Sir Robert's input, on the other hand, addresses broader political considerations, which might include the geographical representation or age structure of the cabinet. The importance of these considerations has been underlined since the Nationals assumed government in their own right. In 1978 journalist Hugh Lunn constructed a profile of the ten National party members of the coalition cabinet. Nine were farmers or graziers and all ten were men, with an average age of sixty-one years. All had left school before the end of Year 12, all came from small towns, and not one of them included reading, theatre, music, history, writing or antiques among their hobbies (Weekend Australian, 2 December 1978). By 1988 the cabinet profile was somewhat broader, with about half of the eighteen ministers listed as farmers or graziers, in some cases not exclusively so. By this stage other occupational groups were represented in cabinet; one
of the eighteen ministers was a woman and she and one other minister were Brisbane-based.

In large part it was Sir Robert Sparkes who forced this broader composition. By the late 1970s he was aware that cabinet had come to be regarded as unrepresentative of many of the groups the National party needed to attract in order to realise its political ambitions. At the same time the Nationals had to ensure that their traditional support base in the coastal farmlands and in the rural areas west of the Great Divide was not made uneasy. Sir Robert Sparkes played a crucial role in carefully balancing these considerations. It was he, for example, who in 1980 convinced Joh Bjelke-Petersen to elevate Mike Ahern to the ministry and to allocate him an industry-related portfolio. He also insisted that cabinet's "northern" representation required bolstering, which led to the elevation several years later of Bob Katter Jnr. It was also Sparkes who in 1986 helped to engineer the preselection of Brian Austin for the newly created seat of Nicklin, on the Sunshine Coast. This was not easily achieved. Austin, whose marginal northside Brisbane seat of Wavell had been abolished in the redistribution of that year, was not a local and, as an ex-Liberal, did not enjoy automatic support within the relevant National party branches. On the other hand Sparkes recognised that Austin had to be protected: not only was he one of the government’s more experienced and able ministers, but also his (and Don Lane’s) switch of allegiance in the wake of the 1983 election had delivered government to the Nationals in their own right.

Articulating the vision of dominance

Although Joh Bjelke-Petersen may have thought otherwise, the Country party's successful transformation into the National party was effected not by the efforts of the parliamentary team alone, but as a result of a strategy forged by the tight teamwork of the parliamentary and organisational leadership of the party. The change involved not just a new label for the party but a calculated broadening of its policy interests and, to accommodate them, a modernising of the party's administrative operations.
Sparkes was the architect who gave effect to the Nationals’ dream of political dominance in Queensland. His vision embraced notions not only of maintaining dominance of the state’s coalition, but also of the National party ultimately governing in its own right, and entrenching itself as the party permanently in power, the party which was the "natural choice" for Queenslanders. But to achieve this position the Nationals first had to eclipse the state Liberals, and the only way to do that was to establish a metropolitan branch base and a much closer relationship with the Brisbane business community.

Sparkes’s plan was extraordinarily ambitious, indeed quite audacious given the problems the Country party faced in the early 1970s. A new name for the party had to be found, a sound professional footing for the party organisation secured, and new policies attractive to a broader constituency devised. Collectively these measures would facilitate the growth of a wider political organisation at the grassroots level.

Implementing this strategy was not easy and efforts were not immediately rewarded, despite the very strong organisational teamwork of Sir Robert and Mike Evans, the former school teacher and relative of Sir Robert who became party executive director in the same year Sparkes became president. In particular, the Nationals still had an image problem in the metropolitan area. Somehow this had to be overcome.

Widespread disaffection with the policies of successive federal governments provided an opportunity for the Queensland Nationals to create a bridgehead of support amongst urban and metropolitan voters in general, and the business community in particular. The fact that the Nationals were in coalition with the state Liberals was a limiting factor, although the Nationals had much to thank their partners for in terms of how to deal with business. For example, Sir Gordon Chalk, the Liberal state leader and deputy premier for eleven years under Sir Frank Nicklin, Jack Pizzey and Joh Bjelke-Petersen, spent many hours introducing Bjelke-Petersen to Brisbane’s business leaders. These contacts were doubtless invaluable for the new premier, but Sir Gordon also was showing the National party how to network the business community. By the time Chalk retired in 1976 the Nationals had learnt their own
way around and had started to develop their own contacts; they no longer needed as much assistance from their coalition partners. Sparkes and Evans were spending a great deal of time doing their own networking, visiting the boardrooms in Brisbane’s commercial heart, and entertaining corporate identities at the party’s Spring Hill headquarters, known to all as The Bunker.

The Nationals still lacked an urban base, but in the wake of Chalk’s departure Sparkes and Evans recognised the opportunity available to the party to reinforce the advantages accruing from its senior status in the coalition. To do so new policies still had to be developed. Up until the early 1970s the policy structure in the party was very limited. Several policy committees covered traditional areas of interest, but they were not notably active. The need for new policies to widen the party’s electoral base necessitated the formation of new policy committees. Some of these paralleled ministerial portfolios (for example, education and health); others involved a greater degree of portfolio subdivision or policy targeting (for example, small business). Certain others appeared to have no relationship at all with state-level responsibilities but reflected a close identification with federal issues of major public interest (for example, defence, sports, and communications). One or two of the original policy committees remained intact, most notably the Lands Committee, chaired continuously since 1966 by Sir Robert Sparkes himself. In all, by 1988 twenty-seven different party policy committees had been developed, as well as several others of a specific purpose or temporary nature (see Appendix G for details).

The development of the policy committee structure allowed the National party to recognise policy opportunities across the spectrum of state government activities. The Nationals could shadow the performance of Liberal ministers and, occasionally, pre-empt or embarrass the Liberal party by announcing policy initiatives in a portfolio where the Liberals were supposedly in charge (for example, Industrial Relations). These actions not only rattled the Liberal party’s confidence but also demonstrated to both the general public and the business community that the National party was the party of ideas in the coalition. Furthermore, such activities were intended to show that, as senior party
in the coalition, the Nationals were prepared to inject policy initiatives whenever and wherever required, if necessary overriding Liberal party opposition and public service advice to Liberal ministers. For example, the National party strongly advocated the abolition of death duties, despite strong public opposition from treasurer Sir Gordon Chalk and other Liberals.

The National party policy committees have played a critical role in the party's networking of the professional and business communities. Gaining access to the boardrooms of major companies was the first task, but the establishment of party policy committees allowed for a more direct contribution by business to policy development. Some ministers realised the potential of such involvement. A typical example was Mike Ahern who, as minister for Industry, Small Business and Technology from 1983 to 1986, used his party's Industry Commerce and Economics Committee to build up contacts in industry for himself and his party.

These committees are often briefed, too, by senior public servants. While the practice itself may not be dissimilar to that in some other places, it should be viewed in Queensland in the context of the blurring which has taken place between the roles of party and government. At a very practical level, senior public servants have recognised that one of the major roles of the party policy committees is to provide the government with an alternative source of advice to the public service. As a result the committees, or those of them which are active and interested, tend to be viewed with caution by public servants. This is especially the case when committee chairpersons have access to the key players: in this context, the premier, the party president, and senior members of the State Management Committee such as Sir Charles Holm, Sir William Allen, and Bruce Campbell.

Apart from the position of chairperson, the membership of policy committees is confidential. Most committee members are Nationals, although the party's by-laws do provide for non-party committee membership where individuals possess specialist knowledge. There are some current examples. The Arts and Heritage Committee includes two non-party members - Norman Llewellyn, the executive director of Brisbane Warana Festival Ltd, and Peter Dent, Manager of the Queensland Arts Council.
All policy committee chairpersons, however, must be party members. Most are members of State Management Committee, are prominent in branch affairs, or are state or federal parliamentarians. In 1988 one member of the Management Committee, Eric Powne, was chairing two different policy committees, while a senior public servant in the State Government Computer Centre, Graham Smith, was chairing the party's Science and Technology Committee.

The development of the policy committee structure was crucial to the broadening of the Nationals' political legitimacy in Queensland. Through these committees, the party's task at first was to demonstrate to urban conservative voters that it offered superior policies and better leadership than the Liberals. This particular combination of qualities was necessary to "seed" the developing branch structure in the metropolitan area. This was handled by a very small group of party supporters including Glen Shiel, Marjorie Shiel, Bill Siller, Bev Siller, Jim Gillan, Ted Howard, Dermot Lynch, and David Russell. At first a slow process, it gained momentum as the bickering among state Liberals intensified as they cast about in search of the future role for their party north of the Tweed.

**Breaking through**

The establishment of the Bjelke-Petersen Foundation in 1979 facilitated a change in the Brisbane business community's perceptions of the National party. While the establishment of the Foundation attracted a deal of public distrust over the possible motives involved, the National party argued that a modern political party could only be successful if it was able to secure its financial viability. The objective of the Foundation was to raise $2.5 million which was to be invested in commercial buildings in selected centres throughout the state. The income thus generated was to be used partly to meet the costs of election campaigns and partly "to promote the merits of the Free Enterprise philosophy and generally enhance the effectiveness of the Party Organisation in its struggle to preserve the Free Enterprise system" (*Financial Review*, 25 May 1979).
The interest of the business community in the Foundation was captured by the Nationals' successfully enlisting the names of a number of prominent Brisbane business identities. In the past Brisbane business persons generally dealt with the state government via the deputy premier who, under the coalition arrangement, was always a Liberal. Now, through the Bjelke-Petersen Foundation, the Nationals had attracted the likes of Sir Ernest Savage and Sir Roderick Proctor. Savage was chairman of the Bank of Queensland and a long-time partner in the accounting firm Coopers and Lybrand. Proctor, on the other hand, was well known not only as a senior partner in another accounting firm, Hungerfords, but also as a prominent company director.

The association of such names with the National party's cause sent signals to Brisbane's commercial world. Rumours also circulated that a major Queensland multinational corporation had made a generous donation to the Nationals which allowed the party's Spring Hill headquarters to be refurbished. The message of all this was clear: the Nationals were on the move.

But other messages were also conveyed, as was graphically captured in an exchange between National party executive director Mike Evans and interviewer Peter Ross in a *Four Corners* programme on ABC TV on 25 September 1982. Evans was also secretary of the Bjelke-Petersen Foundation.

*Interviewer:* As the Queensland boom hotted up over the last few years, developers and businessmen of all kinds found themselves being enthusiastically canvassed by the Foundation's organizers. To many businessmen, the message seemed to be no contribution, no contracts. Now I'm just taking out one section of the letter you sent out - "It's in the protection of your commercial future as well as your basic democratic lifestyle for you to donate to the Bjelke-Petersen Foundation."

*Mike Evans:* Well I don't think there's anything wrong with that. What that is saying, [is that] your commercial future is in fact supporting (for) the Party to support the private enterprise way of life. Therefore commercial future equals [the] private enterprise way of life.
Interviewer: A very essential investment.

Mike Evans: Investment for the private enterprise way of life.

Interviewer: In the protection of your commercial future.

Mike Evans: Well look, I think I've explained that private enterprise equals what you're talking about.

From the outset the benefits of donating to the Foundation were tangible. According to Margaret Cribb in the *Current Affairs Bulletin* in October 1981, donors were offered a variety of incentives ranging from the naming of a building in their honour to a private dinner with the premier; alternatively, they could place advertisements in the party's journal, *National Outlook*, which - because of the tax deductibilities then available to businesses for advertising costs - would be effectively free.

The significant level of donations to the Bjelke-Petersen Foundation also provided the party with a financial boost in its bid to secure a metropolitan presence. At the 1980 state election, for example, the Nationals were prepared to spend $80,000 on the seat of Toowong alone. It was an expensive gamble, and the seat was not won, but the party's strategy was principally to establish a meaningful presence in the area. To do so they selected a high-profile candidate (realtor Peter Forrest), spent a great deal of money, and got the party known locally. In an immediate sense the bid failed, but the investment paid off at the election three years later when, in the wake of the coalition's self-destruction, television personality Earle Bailey won the seat for the party.

**Entrenching "the club"**

The Bjelke-Petersen Foundation may have been set up with a fund-raising objective, but in reality it also helped to generate a new wisdom in Queensland. This was that the National party was not only the way to go for business, but also the only way to go for anyone with "a positive approach", to use Sir Joh's term.

Senior figures in the National party or others closely associated with it frequently had honours bestowed on them by Buckingham Palace. For example, six of the seven 1982 directors of the Bjelke-Petersen Foundation - more precisely, its trustee company NPA
Nominees Pty Ltd - have received knighthoods on the recommendation of the Queensland government. These were Sir Robert Sparkes (state president), Sir Charles Holm (senior vice-president), Sir William Allen (party state treasurer), Sir Edward Lyons (party trustee), Sir Roderick Proctor (party trustee), and Sir Ernest Savage. And while overlapping significantly with the previous group, it is noteworthy that by the time Bjelke-Petersen retired twelve members of the National party's powerful State Management Committee had received imperial honours on the recommendation of the state government. These included - in addition to Sparkes, Holm, Allen, and Sir Joh himself - Sir Sydney Roberts, Sir Frank Moore, and Sir Douglas Logan. Three others were recipients of OBEs and two others MBEs.

Business identities regarded as supporters of the National party, or personal supporters of Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, commonly received high honours or were offered appointments on the boards of various government bodies. Of course, many of these people were distinguished in their fields and were thus obvious candidates. Yet despite the talents of the individuals concerned, the message was being conveyed to the business community that a close association with the National party could be very rewarding. Sir Roderick Proctor, a party trustee and successful business man, was appointed chairman of the SGIO Building Society. Sir Edward Lyons, a merchant banker and party trustee who had developed a close personal friendship with Sir Joh, was appointed chairman of the Totalisator Agency Board (TAB) in 1981. Sir Ernest Savage was appointed to chair two public sector-related inquiries. Advertising expert Sir Frank Moore, a member of the National party State Management Committee, was also appointed chairman of the Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation. And another advertising identity, Fred Maybury, who was also a member of the Management Committee as well as a key National party activist in the business community, received appointment first as the state government's advertising officer and later as Queensland Pavilion Commissioner during World Expo.

Honours were even made available to southerners who came to Queensland and publicly empathised with the "positive approach" of the Bjelke-Petersen government. A Sydney insurance business
man, Justin Hickey, who was virtually unknown in Queensland at the time, amazed the Queensland establishment by being awarded a knighthood in the Queensland government's honours list of 1979. Sir Justin's account of the events surrounding his award is revealing; he had this to say in an interview with Peter Ross on ABC TV's *Four Corners* on 25 September 1982.

**Justin Hickey:** Mr Bjelke-Petersen came to me and said, I'm trying to raise $200,000 on which the Federal Government will subsidise four to one, to raise a million dollars to build a senior citizens hospice, if I can use that term, and naturally as a politician he wanted to build it in his electorate. I said, right, how much can you raise? And he said, I feel we can raise $100,000. I said write my name down for another hundred.

**Interviewer:** Just like that?

**Justin Hickey:** Just like that.

**Interviewer:** You could understand the perceptions that you bought your knighthood, to put it crudely?

**Justin Hickey:** That has been well aired, indeed yes.

**Interviewer:** Which came first, the cheque and the knighthood or . . .

**Justin Hickey:** The cheque and the knighthood.

**Interviewer:** Or the $100,000?

**Justin Hickey:** Oh no I paid the $100,000 before I ever received the knighthood.

The state government was even charged by its opponents with discriminating among National party electorates in terms of the extent of pork-barrelling of imperial honours. In August 1985 the deputy Opposition leader, Tom Burns, told state parliament that over the preceding five years seventeen people in Sir Joh's own electorate, Barambah, had been recognised for outstanding community service, and only one in Burdekin, another National party electorate with a similar population.

Not only were public positions made available to National party sympathisers but also appointments were sometimes made without
any regard for the clash of interest they might seem to create for the incumbent. The appointment of Keith Williams as chairman of the Gold Coast Waterways Authority was a case in point, although not even the objection of the then local National party state member (Doug Jennings) prompted a reconsideration of the decision. Williams at the time was also owner of Sea World, a large aquatic tourist attraction at the Gold Coast. It is situated on the Broadwater, a channel of water which comes under the jurisdiction of the Gold Coast Waterways Authority.

Joh Bjelke-Petersen simply did not recognise such conflicts of interest or, if he did, he ignored them. The only consideration for him was "to get the job done". To that end, he was of the view that all that was needed was a commitment to the project. Yet the practice of appointing friends of the government to important public positions cast some doubt on who was doing what and for whom. The National party continually preached the gospel of free enterprise, but the state government ensured that major development interests were not open to free market forces. They were supervised in a very personal way by National party supporters. While the state government in Queensland has historically taken a lead in the development of the economy and the provision of infrastructure, it was becoming uncertain whether significant private enterprise could even operate unless it was approved of by the National party apparatus.

For those developers with "sound" connections, however, life in Corporate Queensland was very sweet. Indeed, the state government was even prepared to enact special-purpose legislation to enable particular projects to proceed. In the case of Sanctuary Cove at Hope Island, just north of the Gold Coast, the government passed legislation overriding local council planning requirements to allow the developer to develop low-lying land. That developer was, coincidentally, prominent Bjelke-Petersen supporter Mike Gore. In another case special legislation was passed to allow a developer, Girvan Brothers Pty Ltd, to override local government requirements in developing the Toowong Village shopping centre. Special legislation was also enacted to allow the development of the Iwasaki International Tourist Centre at Yeppoon in central Queensland. In that case an agreement was established whereby
the developer was provided with crown land and leasehold concessions in return for a substantial investment in an international resort. Although the Japanese developer appeared subsequently to have breached the agreement, Joh Bjelke-Petersen tolerated these breaches. This was despite growing doubts about the project even from inside the National party.

The National party in government has sought to create the impression that it supports free enterprise. In reality, however, it has sought principally to cater to those who support it. It sees itself exclusively as a party in power. It has cultivated an environment in which the distinction between party and government has been lost, and the distinction between public and private interest is either not recognised or not accepted as a relevant consideration.

For those who aligned themselves with the Nationals, the government-business relationship has worked splendidly. Certain developers over the years have been given control of prime city or beachfront land without going to tender. Others have benefited from "fast track" approvals which were justified on the basis of overcoming unnecessary bureaucratic delays. In reality, such approvals were nothing more than attempts to overcome by-laws which had been designed to protect the public's interest. In the process, windfall profits were sometimes conferred at the expense of the community as a whole.

In other instances the government has unhesitatingly intervened in the tendering process to assist a favoured group. For example, the Port of Brisbane Authority in 1979 recommended that the contract for stevedoring operations at the new container terminal in Brisbane should be awarded to Associated Container Transportation (Australia) Ltd. It made this decision on the basis of favourable advice received from the United Graziers Association, the Brisbane Chamber of Commerce, the Customs Agents Association, and Hungerfords, an independent accounting firm. Cabinet subsequently advised the Port Authority that it should favourably consider an alternative proposal by Brisbane Wharves and Wooldumping Pty Ltd (BWWD), a subsidiary of the P&O shipping line. The chief executive of BWWD was Mr Brian Baillie, who at the time was also Queensland head of P&O.
Cabinet ultimately overturned the recommendation of the Port Authority and awarded the stevedoring agreement to the consortium of BWWD and ANL. This decision was apparently based on a report to State Management Committee by Sir Sydney Roberts, a rural industry businessman who was also the Nationals’ immediate past state president. It should also be added that BWWD already controlled the existing container terminal situated on the Hamilton reach of the Brisbane River. In other words, the decision on the new terminal meant that BWWD effectively monopolised control of container terminal facilities at the Brisbane port. The squabble prompted one member of the Port Authority, the ALP Brisbane Lord Mayor Frank Sleeman, to resign his Authority position in protest. Even Sir Charles Barton, at the time the Authority’s chairman and himself a distinguished public servant, obliquely criticised the state government. Sir Charles, who suggested that “Cabinet may have had more information than the Authority” (although the evidence was to the contrary), also noted that other matters of a political nature might have been involved in the decision (Weekend Australian, 7-8 April 1979; Telegraph, 24 April 1979).

Evidence to the Fitzgerald Inquiry suggested that much less subtle oiling of the party machine was also going on. Counsel assisting the inquiry, Doug Drummond QC, revealed that two construction companies won $86 million worth of Queensland government contracts after donating to the National party (Courier-Mail, 6 December 1988). An international construction company, Citra Constructions Ltd, donated $250,000 to the Nationals in February 1983 and, six months later, was awarded a $2.5 million contract to build the Bundaberg Maternity Hospital. Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen responded to Mr Drummond by denying that he knew of the donation at the time the contract was awarded. Nevertheless Citra was awarded the tender against the advice of both the Bundaberg Hospital Board and the Health Department as well as the recommendation of the Health minister. Initially the tender had been awarded to Evans Harch at a fixed price of $2.497 million, and indeed this was announced in a press release from the Health minister on 7 October 1983. The matter was then deferred in cabinet for several weeks. On 24 October the premier informed cabinet that Citra had won the contract. The eventual bill was
some $69,000 more than the fixed-price contract offered by Evans Harch.

Citra also was granted government contracts totalling $59 million as part of the Queensland mainline electrification scheme. Mr Drummond also told the inquiry that another company, Electric Power Transmissions, donated $90,000 to the National party within days of being awarded a $25 million rail electrification contract (Courier-Mail, 6 December 1988).

But the government did not merely look after those in the business community who supported it. It was also very generous to its own kind. The families and friends of certain ministers, or certain individuals close to the government, were treated generously. Also, some retired or defeated National party parliamentarians were found attractive jobs. Former National party deputy leader Ron Camm was appointed chairman of the Queensland Sugar Board, former MLA for Wynnum Bill Lamond made chairman of the Queensland Small Business Association, former MLA for Mourilyan Vicki Kippin a departmental liaison officer for north Queensland, and former minister Max Hodges appointed chairman of the Port of Brisbane Authority.

In 1986 the Queensland Police minister, Bill Gunn, permitted the police commissioner, Sir Terence Lewis and Lady Lewis to reside for some months in the ministerial suite on the top floor of Police headquarters while their new home was being built in the inner Brisbane suburb of Paddington. Both Lewis and Gunn defended the arrangement on the grounds that a serving police officer was entitled to a rent allowance of $7 per fortnight, and that, while using the ministerial suite, Lewis was not claiming that allowance. Yet the availability of that accommodation, at what was a peppercorn rental, was a privilege not available to other police officers. The arrangement also raised the separate question of whether it was even appropriate for the minister and the police commissioner to come to such an agreement between themselves.

The electorates of ministers, or those of their families, also sometimes received remarkably generous levels of support from the public purse. In August 1982, for example, a Bjelke-Petersen family company purchased two large properties in the vicinity of Duaringa, a township of some 350 people in central Queensland.
Over the next several years some $10 million in state government funds was earmarked for improvements in the district; most of it was intended to be pumped into projects which, coincidentally, benefited the Bjelke-Petersen family properties. This included $4 million for a weir at Tartrus on the upper reaches of the Mackenzie River, the beneficiaries of which would include the Bjelke-Petersen properties, and a further $3 million for a bridge over the river. This project, however, only reached the design stage before Joh Bjelke-Petersen’s retirement. Some $1.5 million was allocated for roadworks on the Apis Creek Road leading past the Ten Mile property owned by the Bjelke-Petersen family; $377,000 of that amount was approved the very day after the Main Roads Department assumed responsibility for these roadworks from the local shire council. A new police station and cell block were built in Duaringa in 1984 at a cost of $472,353. Also, a new school building (to accommodate eight students) was built near Ten Mile at a cost of $131,738. Upgrading of the local Duaringa racetrack was also undertaken, even though only three or four race meetings had been held there over the previous three years (Courier-Mail, 18 February 1989).

Apart from the actual size of the largesse which was targeted for Duaringa, documents tendered to the Fitzgerald Inquiry regarding these matters suggested an involvement by the premier’s own office. Normally such decisions are made at departmental level. According to journalist Phil Dickie, the documents also revealed that an officer of a foreign bank "had to go along" with a request for a loan to a Bjelke-Petersen family company and that a shortfall in the loan was made up with money which a Japanese company paid in options it never exercised. The Fitzgerald Inquiry saw a telex from a bank officer called in by Sir Joh, which read, in part:

For a proper assessment of this request the information available at this time is rather limited, but we think that we have to go along as this would open further avenues in Queensland. I am told we will always be approached first for Queensland Government and semi-government finance requirements. If this application does not find your consent we believe that it would affect negatively our business in this State.
At the Inquiry Sir Joh angrily denied he had ever suggested anything of the sort. (Courier-Mail, 18 February 1989).

Neither ministers nor party officials have attempted to disguise apparent conflicts between public duty and private interest. In 1986 certain dairy quotas, known as entitlements, were diverted from the Darling Downs into the south-east corner of the state where several prominent National party identities have connections with the dairy industry. Among those who stood to gain from the diversions were the family of senior government minister Russ Hinze, whose family supplied milk to the South Coast Dairy Co-Op Association Ltd, and Sir Charles Holm, senior vice-president of the Queensland National party and also a dairy farm owner in the south-east. Another identity involved in the same controversy was Sam Doumany, a former Liberal minister and subsequently a member of the National party. Doumany was the state government-appointed chairman of the Queensland Milk Board.

Some ministers mixed their public and personal business interests very carelessly. Former Local Government and Racing minister Russ Hinze attracted persistent criticism during his career for alleged conflicts of interest. To the Fitzgerald Inquiry he also revealed just how fortunate he and his wife Fay had been in their business dealings. For example, he said that construction magnate Sir Leslie Thiess had not asked for the repayment of loans totalling $550,000 which he had made to Fay Hinze over an eight-year period. Hinze also told the inquiry that he and Fay were paying rent of just $1 per month for a Gold Coast penthouse owned by Sir Leslie. In separate evidence to the inquiry, however, it was heard that Sir Leslie had gained state government contracts over the period when the loans were being made, that is, when Hinze was minister for Local Government. Those contracts included one for Townsville’s Breakwater Casino and a large coal contract.

But the system did not merely reward party loyalists and business supporters. Senior public servants were similarly favoured. They received high honours, appointments to plum government or semi-government boards and post-retirement positions of influence inside and outside government, often in companies with sound business or personal connections either to the National party or to
Sir Joh. And while such appointments on the one hand may be seen as appropriate recognition of outstanding ability, they also reflect the extent to which corporations have viewed the beneficiaries as assisting them to "do business" in Queensland. The controversy surrounding the $400,000 out-of-court defamation payment made by Alan Bond to Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen has not dampened the importance of this "doing business successfully" argument. In a television interview with Jana Wendt on Channel 9 in early 1988, referred to earlier, Bond suggested that he saw such a payment as necessary in order for him to deal successfully in Queensland. In later evidence before the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal he suggested that he had not meant what he appeared to have said. The counsel assisting the ABT, however, suggested that Bond had been placed in a position of commercial blackmail by the then premier of Queensland (Courier-Mail, 7 February 1989).

The system which the Nationals have entrenched in Queensland encourages compliance with "the rules of the game". The "rules" do not permit criticism. Those who do not play the game, or who do not support the Nationals, or who criticise the standing arrangements, risk being ostracised. On a number of occasions Sir Joh effectively threatened electors in certain marginal seats by remarking that, if they did not return a National party member, they could expect to get nothing further from the government. One of the first of these incidents occurred in November 1977 when the premier threatened that state government funds for the Lake Julius Dam in the Mount Isa electorate would not necessarily continue if the sitting National MLA, Angelo Bertoni, lost the seat. As Bjelke-Petersen phrased it, "While I've got a worker for my party in Mt Isa, we will always play our part. Any other candidate will have no access to me at all" (Australian, 4 November 1977).

Those who dared to criticise the government, or Sir Joh, were often attacked quite viciously. At the same political meeting where Bjelke-Petersen threatened the Lake Julius Dam funding the premier was asked by a woman in the crowd why he branded all anti-uranium campaigners as communists or left-wing radicals. He responded, "If you squawk like a crow, look like a crow and fly like a crow you'll be shot with the crows." It was an unfortunate attack. The lady questioner was a former Miss Australia.
Evidence before the Fitzgerald Inquiry revealed the extent to which the government was prepared to go in order to stifle criticism. Bjelke-Petersen confirmed what many had suspected about the government’s handling of street marches, namely, that the police force had been given power over street march permits for "political reasons". The inquiry also heard evidence that the government was prepared to use the police force to destroy its opponents, both Labor and Liberal.

Up until 1986 the Nationals tended to ignore any criticisms alleging cronyism or other corrupt practices within the government or party apparatus. However, this was somewhat harder to do after allegations levelled by one of the party’s own trustees, Sir Roderick Proctor, that the government was guilty of cronyism and had made a charade of public tendering.

Instead of acknowledging the problem, the party severed its ties with Sir Roderick. And when the Labor and Liberal parliamentarians predictably took up his allegations, members of the government chose to defend themselves not on the floor of parliament but by issuing more than forty writs against those who had impugned the government’s honesty. On the grounds of protecting the government’s good name, the writs were taken out by all ministers. They were funded not by them, however, but by the public purse. Ironically, the government decided in the wake of the Fitzgerald Inquiry revelations not to proceed with many of the actions.

For some people in Queensland, the system of doing business has apparently worked so well that government supporters were even prepared to donate, anonymously, tens of thousands of dollars in cash, dropping the amounts off at the premier’s office. At the Fitzgerald Inquiry on 5 December 1988 Sir Joh told how people who didn’t even leave their names had left $110,000 in donations in his office. He said that he had not involved himself with the source of the donations and his staff "probably didn’t want to know either". Sir Joh went on to say that he and his staff did not issue receipts or keep notes on who made donations. And when asked by Commissioner Fitzgerald if it was unusual for large cash sums to be handed over as donations, Sir Joh replied, "No, not at all, sir." Mr Fitzgerald then asked what conversation had
been held with a Hong Kong businessman before he had handed over a cash donation of $100,000 to Sir Joh's secretary. According to the former premier the man had indicated that he had wanted "to help the party, we are interested in the way you operate" (Courier-Mail, 6 December 1988).

Propagating the regime and imposing its values

By the 1980s the Nationals in Queensland had cultivated an environment whereby to attack the premier, the National party or the government was to risk being labelled un-Queensland, or anti-Queensland. The government operated in a power vacuum without institutional impediment, while its propagation of the "Queensland first" dogma was continuously reinforced by the separate existence of strongly mobilised party and government media machines and, in particular, by publicly funded political advertisements under the auspices of the state government.

There has been no limit, in fact, to the government's preparedness to use taxpayer-funded political advertising to propagate the message that what was good for itself was automatically good for Queensland. Sometimes the government has managed to entice industry into this process of legitimation. For example, in 1985 state cabinet decided to hold one of its normal Brisbane meetings not in the Executive Building but in the refurbished National Bank Building on the corner of Queen and Creek streets in the Brisbane central business district. The decision, while seemingly innocuous, was loaded with significance. The government was struggling in the opinion polls and, with the next state election in prospect, was especially anxious to underline its commitment to, and reputation in, the business community. The Nationals were equally concerned to project a more moderate position on conservation issues in a bid to maintain their support base among metropolitan ex-Liberals.

The rationale for holding a cabinet meeting in the historic venue was as a gesture in recognition of the building's centenary. The government may also have justified its decision on the basis that occasional cabinet meetings had been held there during the 1880s. But the real motivation for holding cabinet's 11 June 1985 meeting in the same building was political rather than historical, evidenced
by the costly commemorative booklet which the Premier's Department published for the occasion. The booklet not only depicted a close association between Sir Joh's government and a major banking organisation, thereby reminding people of the commitment to business, but it also contained extensive colour photography of a number of other buildings which the government had claimed to have preserved. There was also a personal message from the premier which contained suggestions that his government was strongly committed to heritage and conservation.

The government has been interested, too, to propagate its own value systems and, if necessary, to impose behavioural and intellectual conformity on its citizens, notably through the state education system. Joh Bjelke-Petersen summarised his position in the following terms:

Educators will get the message that we only allow wholesome, decent, practical material in schools... And we want the department, whoever is there, to get a clear understanding this is what the government intends to happen. (Courier-Mail, 20 July 1982).

During the coalition period the government directly involved itself in curriculum issues, banning several sets of curriculum materials used widely in other states. These included MACOS (Man: A Course of Study) and SEMP (Social Education Materials Project). This approach was further underlined after the Nationals assumed government in their own right, at least up until Bjelke-Petersen's departure from the premiership.

In March 1985 the Education minister, Lin Powell, warned teachers not to use a Human Rights Commission teaching kit dealing with issues including the law, citizenship and discrimination. He described the kit as "nefarious rubbish". A book on the High Court was also banned because, in the words of the public service director-general of Education at the time, George Berkeley, it showed "a bias toward the Federal Government's centralist views of the court" (Age, 6 March 1986). Powell also announced that a Peace Studies kit would not be used in state schools because it was "communist-inspired". Meanwhile, the state government in 1984 instructed state school teachers that evolution
was to be taught only as a theory and that alternative (Old Testament) models about creation were to be provided. The Education minister then proceeded to organise "creation science seminars" from which University of Queensland scientists were excluded; they had wanted to attend the seminars to put the case for evolutionary creation.

The government's evident position throughout all of these skirmishes was that it was prepared to take direct control of education policy in order to ensure that the "interests of the people" were protected. In reality, it was underlining its determination to propagate the moral and spiritual dimensions of Queensland's one-party state.
The constitution of the Queensland National Party proclaims a commitment to "a society based on belief in God and loyalty to the Queen", to "democracy, liberty and individual enterprise", and to the "restriction of the power and size of government and taxation to the levels which least intrude into the lives of the people". As the foregoing chapters indicate, however, this rhetoric has been little more than a convenient facade to camouflage the nature of the governing machine and to rationalise its behaviour.

The National party has enjoyed great success in Queensland. In 1972 it was a narrowly based group threatened with electoral extinction. By the end of 1983 it had doubled its support and secured government in its own right. With the assistance of loaded electoral dice it achieved pre-eminence by superior political strategy and organisation and by an unrelenting and ruthless determination to entrench itself as the permanent party in government. But while the Nationals in power portrayed themselves as the party of free enterprise, economic development and moral righteousness, the Fitzgerald Inquiry revealed that during their stewardship politics in Queensland was rife with corruption.

It is inappropriate to rest the blame entirely on the Nationals. Labor had enjoyed forty years of almost unbroken office in the state prior to 1957, and it was during this lengthy period that Queensland’s one-party system, since refined, first emerged. Ironically, too, it was a Labor government in Queensland which, in the name of "balanced representation", introduced an electoral system which was later remodelled by its political opponents in
order to keep Labor out of office and to minimise the influence of the state Liberals.

For the Nationals the zonal electoral system provided the building blocks of their regime and a buffer against political defeat. This advantage allowed the National party to propagate unchallenged its message of unfettered economic development for Queensland and underline its commitment to the moral protection of the state's inhabitants.

The message behind all this was simple: the only path to prosperity for Queensland was with the Nationals. Criticism of any kind, or alternative views of the state's future, were dismissed with contempt as being un-Queensland, anti-Queensland and, therefore, illegitimate.

Emphasis was continually placed on strong leadership, progress, and "getting things done" for Queensland. There was a disregard for the fate of institutions, such as the parliament, whose role it was to provide a check on the government's behaviour. Such checks were viewed as impediments, so their influence had to be neutralised. The Opposition was viewed similarly: by virtue of its position it was seen as having nothing positive to offer. In any case, the ALP Opposition seemed a good deal more interested in its own internal wranglings than in wresting government from its opponents. It was seldom viewed as a viable alternative. The National party was free to operate in what was largely a power vacuum. Provided it could keep its political opponents neutralised and its critics muzzled or discredited, it believed it could stay in office forever.

The Nationals' perception of their invulnerability bred arrogance among those who wielded the power. Some came apparently to believe that they could do almost anything they wished, provided of course that the party organisation approved. Encouraged by the conviction that what was good for the Nationals was good for Queensland (and perhaps good for them personally), many within or close to the National party came to equate the roles of party and government. Government was for the benefit of the Nationals, while the public purse was something to be dispersed principally amongst the party's supporters. There was no such thing as differentiating public duty from private interest.
The Nationals were able to dismiss criticism of the way the government did its business by pointing to the state’s economic achievements, and to the major development projects the state continued to attract. The government employed the same dismissive strategy in dealing with more serious allegations of corruption, usually flatly refusing to acknowledge any possibility of such activity. For years this strategy worked well, but the 1986 allegations of cronyism in the state government by National party trustee Sir Roderick Proctor made this "deny all" approach far less credible.

The Fitzgerald Inquiry, which began in mid 1987, has revealed that over many years links had developed in Queensland between criminal and political networks. Crime and corruption became widespread and organised across a range of activities including bribery, prostitution, the operation of sex parlours and brothels, tax evasion, illegal gambling, SP betting, the rorting of ministerial expenses, protection rackets, money laundering and, probably, drug running.

It also appears that corruption in Queensland had become increasingly more organised. Those holding influential public or official positions were gradually incriminated into corruption hierarchies. Crime and corruption came to be sanctioned or excused by key participants in the political and administrative order. Most importantly, by the mid 1980s not only had politicians become involved in crime and corruption, but evidence suggests that these forms of activity had become essential to the running of the machinery of government in Queensland. Corruption was vital to the operation of politics and policy-making in the state.

Exposing the system: the impact of the Fitzgerald Inquiry

The Commission of Inquiry into Possible Illegal Activities and Associated Police Misconduct, led by Tony Fitzgerald QC, was established by the state government in May 1987. The decision to establish the inquiry was taken by acting premier Bill Gunn while the premier, Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, was overseas. Gunn’s action probably had as much to do with jockeying for the leadership in the National party (resulting from the anticipated departure
from state politics of Sir Joh) as it did with the pursuit of corruption. Gunn was one of the contenders for the premiership, and Bjelke-Petersen's own choice for his successor. But Gunn had an image problem with the public, who saw him as little more than a Joh clone. If nothing else, his decision to establish the inquiry gave him the opportunity to distinguish himself from the premier, and thus demonstrate his leadership qualities to parliamentary colleagues and the public alike.

The Fitzgerald Inquiry was established as a limited probe into alleged police misconduct. By the time it had completed taking public evidence, however, it had become an investigation into Queensland's entire institutional fabric. The evidence had revealed how the processes of government in Queensland had deteriorated over a very long period of time.

The lines of investigation pursued by the inquiry severely embarrassed the Nationals, yet the incoming premier, Mike Ahern, and Bill Gunn, who retained the deputy premiership, continued unequivocally to support it. They sought to represent the Ahern ministry as a totally new government watching events unfold with the concern only of an interested bystander. It was a difficult position to sustain: Ahern himself had been in parliament for twenty years, and a minister in the Bjelke-Petersen government for eight, and most of his cabinet had been members of Bjelke-Petersen's ministry.

While it is unlikely that Ahern can credibly portray his ministry as totally removed from the corruption his government is committed to purging, there is also little evidence in Australia to suggest that the exposure of corruption inevitably leads to electoral destruction. What is potentially electorally harmful, however, is if the revelations of corruption hinder the capacity of the government to govern.

There are signs to suggest that this may be happening with the Queensland Nationals. The sustained impetus of the Fitzgerald investigation has touched a series of troublesome pressure points inside the National party. This is hardly surprising. Persons or groups inside the party, or close to it, who had been part of the previous decision-making processes were threatened by any attempt to expose the way in which the government had previously
conducted its business. Pressure from these quarters has made it difficult for the Nationals to adjust to political life after Bjelke-Petersen and to maintain a united front concerning the way forward. Ahern and Gunn have addressed the corruption issue, but unless they can contain the resulting internal fallout there is a possibility that the party could implode.

The investigatory tentacles of the Fitzgerald Inquiry have latched on to certain areas where corruption has flourished, but the time and resources of the inquiry are limited. And although the inquiry may be able to target a few individuals, or a range of practices, the implementation of reforms - however thorough and useful the recommendations - depends on the goodwill of politicians, the active support of the public service, judiciary and police, and the watchfulness of the media.

No panaceas

Despite Mike Ahern’s promise to implement Fitzgerald’s recommendations lock, stock and barrel, some of his political colleagues may cavil at reforms that affect their own interests. Public servants, too, may resist reforms that affect their entrenched privileges.

It is likely that, in the wake of the Fitzgerald Report, a range of structural remedies will be raised in the community, one of which will probably be the reintroduction of an upper house of parliament. The absence of an upper house in the Queensland parliament has been seen as one reason for the state’s less-accountable political system. However, an analysis of the performance of upper houses elsewhere, or even of Queensland’s own Legislative Council prior to its abolition in 1922, does not suggest this as a panacea.

It can be argued that the absence of an upper house in Queensland may have contributed to a political environment which spurned compromise. This was because there were no apparent limitations on the power of the party with a majority on the floor of the Legislative Assembly. But the defunct Queensland Legislative Council could hardly be idealised as a democratic safeguard, upholder of accountability, or defender of the people. On the
The More Things Change

contrary, historian Barry Nethercote argues in fact that it was conceived as, and always acted as a "brake on democracy", and as a "protector of vested interests". Being a house of life appointees, as it was in Queensland, it was responsible to no one; its revisory functions were poorly performed and it acted mostly in the self-interest of the groups its members represented.

None of the Legislative Councils which have survived elsewhere in Australia has evolved in the direction in which advocates of a restored upper chamber in Queensland hope for. Some of the more severe electoral malapportionments in Australian history have occurred in state upper houses. Not one Legislative Council of the five that remain was even elected by adult suffrage until 1950, the last one being New South Wales, in 1979.

State upper houses have not prevented government corruption and cronyism or political scandals. Despite their role as chambers where the administration of government can be scrutinised, Legislative Councils did not prevent the land scandals in Victoria during the latter years of Rupert Hamer's premiership, or the collapse in Western Australia of Rothwells Bank, or prison administration corruption in New South Wales which led to the ministerial demise of Rex Jackson. Nor has the interest of Legislative Councils in such matters necessarily inspired interest or confidence within the community. The Western Australian Legislative Council's investigation of a public works project in 1988 drew no public submissions, even though it invited them.

The practical difficulty of reintroducing a Legislative Council in Queensland is immense. The single house (unicameral) arrangement is one of four matters entrenched within the Queensland Constitution, so that a proposal to reintroduce the Legislative Council would be required to be placed before the people of Queensland in a referendum. Queenslanders would be most unlikely to actually vote in favour of the proposition, especially if a net increase in the number of politicians was involved.

In any case, public debate on the effects of having no upper house deflects criticism from the shortcomings in existing mechanisms or institutions. Politicians may therefore be only too willing to initiate public debate about a non-existent institution
and propose it as a simple and single solution to all that is wrong. The idea has little to offer.

The establishment by the Ahern government of a Public Accounts Committee in Queensland is a welcome initiative in strengthening the parliament’s ability to secure a measure of accountability from the government. Once again, however, this machinery measure should not be regarded as enough. It will be effective only to the extent allowed by its legislation, the wish of its members and staffers, and the requirements of the media or other critics. Freedom of information legislation is another avenue which the media could use to maintain scrutiny, especially regarding government tendering practices. But if there is no real commitment to the principles of this legislation, it could be used defensively by the government. The same applies if there is a move to widen the ombudsman’s powers to include the police. In New South Wales the ombudsman is empowered to investigate the police, but that alone does not prevent corruption.

In any case, initiatives such as these should not be considered for implementation singly. Introduced piecemeal, they may achieve little but, if implemented together, they could make a difference by ensuring some meaningful level of public accountability.

**Is change possible?**

When Mike Ahern assumed the premiership he committed himself to a vision of excellence, to public accountability, and to ending cronism, patronage and corruption within the state government. In those terms he deserves credit for his strong support of the Fitzgerald Inquiry, despite the haemorrhaging its investigations have caused within the National party. The new premier has also presided over the establishment of other mechanisms which should ensure greater public accountability on the part of the state government. These include parliamentary public accounts and public works committees, a pecuniary interest register for all parliamentarians, a code of conduct for public servants, and a foreign land register.

There are other signs, however, which suggest that since Ahern’s accession not very much of substance has changed inside the
National party, the state government apparatus, or even the parliament. A number of examples follow.

- National party identities are still being appointed to plum government jobs. National party treasurer Sir William Allen was appointed chairman of Suncorp; he subsequently resigned as party treasurer, but he has now been appointed a party trustee. Senior party identity and "Joh for PM" strategist Fred Maybury was appointed a member of the Board of the Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation as well as the executive chairman of the state government’s Events Corporation. Another state body, the Queensland Industry Development Corporation is now chaired by Mr C.J. Brennan, who is also the vice-president of the Darling Downs zone of the Queensland National party. Other prominent Nationals have been appointed to the QIDC Board since Mike Ahern took over as premier.

- The Ahern administration is just as prepared as the Bjelke-Petersen government was to use taxpayer funds to support blatantly political causes. It did so in the 1988 federal referendum campaign on the pretext of protecting the interests of Queensland. In 1989 the government admitted that it had used taxpayer funds to pay the legal costs of a small business which was involved in a voluntary employment agreement hearing.

- The evidence remains as strong as ever that the National party organisation both monitors and directly involves itself in the decision-making processes of the government. Some of the evidence for this was provided in chapter 5.

- Notwithstanding the events of 1987 and 1988, elements within the Queensland police force still behave as though they were above or beyond the law. Not only does one contingent of officers badly misbehave during a police football carnival in Toowoomba, but also it is revealed that other police resist cooperating in a government-appointed investigation of the matter.

- The Ahern government - despite its commitment to accountability - has made it illegal to publish information which is under consideration by the new Public Accounts Committee.
Ministers are still taking family members and substantial entourages of public service staff and party colleagues on trips which are of questionable value to the administration of government affairs.

Changing the system in Queensland will not be achieved just by the shock value of Mr Fitzgerald’s report, or by simply pushing an individual out of the premiership or a government out of office. The root problem is an attitudinal one, and it requires an attitudinal solution.

Those who have wielded power in Queensland over many years have worked the system to its limit. They have felt secure in doing so because they were electorally safe, and because they believed that the electorate’s only concern was that the government protect the people by delivering the economic goods.

The Nationals’ attitude was dismissive of critics and utterly resistant to change; it was also one in which the incumbent regime came to regard itself not as providing stewardship of the government, but rather, complete ownership of it. Public and private interests were not distinguished, and the legitimate role of the political Opposition to provide criticism and an alternative viewpoint was neither acknowledged nor understood; meanwhile, those who criticised the one-party line could expect to be muzzled and neutralised.

The Fitzgerald Inquiry has provided hard evidence to support these claims. It also has established in the community’s mind a clear link between hip-pocket interests and the seething corruption which has flourished in Queensland.

While it is encouraging that all three major political parties in Queensland now acknowledge the corruption issue as a major problem, there will be institutional resistance to the implementation of reforms. Perhaps the new generation of politicians in Queensland will be prepared to tackle that resistance and continue the process of enlivening the community’s interest in the way it is governed. This will not be easily achieved because the prevailing cynicism about politicians tends to encourage within the community a feeling of helplessness and wonder about whether it all
matters. But if the community is able to be convinced that such matters are important, it may well be possible to draw a link between the general public's economic self-interest and the corruption of politicians and governments. And if the community does draw that link, and does understand that cronyism and corruption do have a cost - a cost against society as well as a direct economic cost against the people - then perhaps the community will expect better from their elected representatives and their public officials. Perhaps, too, the community will be less prepared to tolerate the behaviour of those who like to regard the public purse as a private and bottomless feeding trough.
APPENDIX A

ADVICE ESTABLISHING THE VALIDITY OF THE STATE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE TO CONVENE A MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENTARY PARTY

Minister for Justice and Attorney-General

POSTAL G.P.O. Box 1601, Brisbane. Qld. 4001. OFFICE: State Law building, Cox Ann & George Streets, Brisbane

MEMORANDUM:


We have been asked to advise as to the legitimacy of a meeting of the State Parliamentary National Party convened by the Management Committee yesterday and to be held at 10 o'clock this morning. In examining this question, it is necessary to refer to a number of the Clauses of the National Party of Australia - Queensland Constitution.

Clause 20 catalogues the Units of the Party. Amongst these are Central Council, the Management Committee and the State Parliamentary Party.

Provisions with respect to the State Parliamentary Party are made in Clauses 103 to 106. Clause 103 states:

"The State Parliamentary Party shall consist of members of the Party elected to the State Parliament as candidates endorsed by the Party and such other members of the Party who are elected to the State Parliament as the Party shall determine."

Clause 104 states:

"The State Parliamentary Party shall appoint a Leader, Deputy Leader, and such other Officers as it may decide, and shall govern its affairs according to its own rules."

Clauses 105 and 106 deal with the role of the State Parliamentary Party with regard to the implementation of the Party platform and policy decisions of Central Council and State Conference and do not impact on the question upon which our advice is sought.

It will be noted that Clause 104 states that the State Parliamentary party "shall govern its affairs
APPENDIX A contd

- 2 -

according to its own rules". No formal rules for the conduct of meetings of the State Parliamentary Party have been made to date. The point in contention is that, at its last meeting prior to the adjournment of Parliament, the State Parliamentary Party entrusted to the Honourable the Premier the responsibility of calling the next meeting.

Despite requests from a number of members that an early meeting be convened, he declined to do so and a number of National Party Members of Parliament (believed to be 34) requested the Management Committee to convene a meeting.

The Management Committee met yesterday (the 25th November, 1987) and almost unanimously fixed a meeting for this morning.

The Management Committee, the membership of which is set out in Clause 91 and which is widely representative of the Executive and the Units of the Party, has a number of powers conferred on it by the Constitution. In particular, Clause 93 states:-

"The Management Committee shall, subject to the provisions hereof, have power to manage all the affairs of the Party. It shall not have power to alter the provisions hereof or the platform and policy of the Party. In particular, and subject as aforesaid:-

(a) ..............
(b) ..............
(c) it shall exercise full control over all members and Units of the Party, receive financial statements and reports from Party Units and hear and determine disputes;
(d) ..............
(e) ..............
(f) it may exercise the powers vested in Central Council when it deems necessary and any such actions shall be submitted to the next meeting of Central Council for ratification and up to that date any action so taken shall be valid whether or not Central Council ratifies the actions.

It will be noted that Clause 93(c) permits the Management Committee to exercise full control over all members and Units of the Party. Clause 93(f) enables it to "exercise the powers vested in Central Council when it deems necessary".
The membership of Central Council is recited in Clause 79. Clause 80 is in the following terms:

"Central Council shall in all matters subject to specific directions herein contained and to decisions of Annual or Special State Conferences exercise full control over the affairs of the Party and subject as aforesaid its decisions on all matters shall be final and binding on all members and Party Units."

It will be noted that one of the powers of Central Council is to "exercise full control over the affairs of the Party".

Clause 82 is in the following terms:

"Notwithstanding anything to the contrary contained herein, should the foregoing powers conferred on Central Council be insufficient to deal with any exigency that may arise, authority is vested in it to take such action as it considers to be appropriate in the interests of the Party, provided that no such action shall contravene the spirit hereof. Every such action of Central Council shall be recorded in its minutes, and be reported to the next following State Conference."

It is our opinion that, taking the abovementioned Clauses of the Constitution in combination, it cannot be asserted that the meeting of the State Parliamentary Party convened by the Management Committee is incompetent to decide the question of Leadership of the Parliamentary Party. In other words, it is our opinion that the meeting has been validly convened.

Minister for Justice and Attorney-General

Solicitor General
APPENDIX B

CORRESPONDENCE FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY PARTY TO THE QUEENSLAND GOVERNOR SIGNALLING THE ABILITY OF MIKE AHERN TO FORM A GOVERNMENT


His Excellency Sir Walter Campbell Q.C.
Governor of Queensland
Government House
Fernberg Road
BARDON Q. 4065

May it please Your Excellency,

At a duly convened meeting of members of the State Parliamentary National Party held in Brisbane today, it was resolved that all elective positions be declared vacant and new elections held for those positions.

As a result of the election held consequent upon that resolution, I was elected Parliamentary Leader of the National Party, and therefore I enjoy the support of the majority of the ruling Party of the Parliament as will be noted by the attached signatures.

As Leader of the ruling Parliamentary Party, I am able to form a government and assure supply to the Crown. No other Member of the Parliament is in a position to give such an absolute assurance.

I accordingly request that Your Excellency issue to me a Commission to form a government and withdraw any Commission existing at the time of receipt of this letter.

I forward also Opinions of the Crown Law Officers and of Messrs. G.L. Davies Q.C. and C.D. Gilbert relating to the matters which Your Excellency is now called upon to determine, which may be of assistance to Your Excellency.

Yours faithfully,

Parliamentary Leader of the National Party

[Signature]
We, the undersigned members of the State Parliamentary National Party, hereby acknowledge that we have read the contents of the attached correspondence and our agreement with its contents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>ELECTORATE</th>
<th>SIGNATURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AHERN M.J.</td>
<td>Landsborough</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALISON G.</td>
<td>Maryborough</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUSTIN B.D.</td>
<td>Nicklin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BERGHOFER C.J.</td>
<td>Toowoomba South</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DJELKE-PETERSEN, Sir Joh</td>
<td>Barambah</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOOTH D.J.</td>
<td>Warwick</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BORBIDGE R.E.</td>
<td>Surfers Paradise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BURREKET T.A.</td>
<td>Townsville</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPMAN Y.A.</td>
<td>Pine Rivers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLAUSON P.J.</td>
<td>Redlands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COOPER T.R.</td>
<td>Roma</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ELLIOTT J.A.</td>
<td>Cunningham</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FITZGERALD A.A.</td>
<td>Lockyer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRASER H.D.J.</td>
<td>Springwood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GATELY L.F.</td>
<td>Currumbin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIBBS I.J.</td>
<td>Albert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GILMORE T.J.G.</td>
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<tr>
<td>GLASSON W.H.</td>
<td>Gregory</td>
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<tr>
<td>GUNN W.A.M.</td>
<td>Somerset</td>
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<tr>
<td>HARPER N.J.</td>
<td>Auburn</td>
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<tr>
<td>HENDERSON I.T.</td>
<td>Mount Gravatt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HINTON D.G.</td>
<td>Broadsound</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HINZE, R.J.</td>
<td>South Coast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOBBS H.W.T.</td>
<td>Warrego</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HARVEY L.T.</td>
<td>GREENSLOPES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HYND T.S.</td>
<td>Nerang</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>KATTER R.C.</td>
<td>Flinders</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>LANE D.F.</td>
<td>Merthyr</td>
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<tr>
<td>LESTER V.P.</td>
<td>Peak Downs</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>LINGARD K.R.</td>
<td>Fassifern</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITTLEPROUD B.G.</td>
<td>Condamine</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCAULEY D.E.</td>
<td>Callide</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKECHNIE P.R.</td>
<td>Carnarvon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCPhIE A.C.</td>
<td>Toowoomba North</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MENZEL M.R.</td>
<td>Mulgrave</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUNTZ G.H.</td>
<td>Whitsunday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEAL D.McC.</td>
<td>Balonne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>NELSON B.A.</td>
<td>Aspley</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>NEWTON L.E.</td>
<td>Glasshouse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POWELL L.W.</td>
<td>Isis</td>
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<tr>
<td>RANDELL J.H.</td>
<td>Mirani</td>
<td></td>
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<td>ROW E.C.</td>
<td>Hinchinbrook</td>
<td></td>
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<td>SHERRIN C.A.</td>
<td>Mansfield</td>
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<td>SIMPSON G.L.</td>
<td>Cooroora</td>
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<td>SLACK D.J.</td>
<td>Burnett</td>
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<td>STEPHAN L.W.</td>
<td>Gympie</td>
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<td>STONEMAN M.D.</td>
<td>Burdekin</td>
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<td>TENNI M.J.</td>
<td>Barron River</td>
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<tr>
<td>VEIVERS M.</td>
<td>Southport</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
## APPENDIX C

### PROPORTION OF VOTERS AND PROPORTION OF SEATS

**PER ZONE: 1977 AND 1985-86 REDISTRIBUTIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>1977 Redistribution*</th>
<th>1985-86 Redistribution**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of votes</td>
<td>% of seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Eastern Zone</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>57.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Brisbane</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial Cities</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western &amp; Far Northern</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* as at November 1977 state election

** The December 1984 figures were those employed by the Electoral Districts Commission in calculating the 1985-86 boundaries
## APPENDIX D

### QUEENSLAND REDISTRIBUTION COMMISSIONERS

(1949 - 1986)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation/Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>The Hon. Mr. Justice Joseph Sheehy (chairman)</td>
<td>Judge of the Supreme Court of Qld</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Douglas Fraser</td>
<td>Senior public service inspector; career public servant since 1919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bernard Maguire</td>
<td>Principal Electoral Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Douglas Fraser (chairman)</td>
<td>Public Service commissioner; previous redistribution commissioner (1949)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John Harvey</td>
<td>Surveyor-General (since 1929)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percy Wright</td>
<td>Barrister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Sir Douglas Fraser (chairman)</td>
<td>Retired Public Servant commissioner; previous redistribution commissioner (1949 and 1958)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Henry Radford</td>
<td>Principal Electoral Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Archibald Archer</td>
<td>Retired grazier; company director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Sir Douglas Fraser (chairman)</td>
<td>Retired Public Service commissioner; previous redistribution commissioner (1949, 1958 and 1971)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Keith Redman</td>
<td>Principal Electoral Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sir Archibald Archer</td>
<td>Retired grazier; company director; previous redistribution commissioner (1971)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>John Andrews (chairman)</td>
<td>Agent-General in London; previously Chairman of the Public Service Board; and Gold Coast City Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sir Thomas Covacevich</td>
<td>Solicitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Col Pearson</td>
<td>Under Secretary, Department of Justice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX E

### QUEENSLAND STATE ELECTIONS 1950-83

**TOTAL STATEWIDE PRIMARY VOTES AND SEATS WON BY EACH POLITICAL PARTY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total No. of seats</th>
<th>Country/ National</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>ALP</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of vote</td>
<td>No. of seats</td>
<td>% of vote</td>
<td>No. of seats</td>
<td>% of vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950 75</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953 75</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21.3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956 75</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957 75</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960 78</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963 78</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966 78</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969 78</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972 82</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974 82</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>1977 82</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>1980 82</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>1983 82</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>43*</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>6*</td>
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<tr>
<td>1986 89</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* includes Don Lane and Brian Austin in the National party 1983 total, even though their seats were actually secured by them as Liberals; they each changed to the National party within days of that election.
## APPENDIX F

### AUSTRALIAN LOWER HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

#### SITTING DAYS, 1967 - 1988

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Qld</th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>Vic</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>Tas</th>
<th>C'wealth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>43*</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>66*</td>
<td>55</td>
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APPENDIX G

ROLE OF PRINCIPAL ORGANISATIONAL ELEMENTS WITHIN THE NATIONAL PARTY OF AUSTRALIA (QLD)

State Conference

The annual State Conference of the National Party of Australia (Queensland) is responsible for determining the general policy of the party. Between 700 and 800 voting delegates are eligible to attend (depending on the numbers of branches), including delegates from the Women's section of the party as well as from the Young Nationals. Each party branch is entitled to send one (1) voting delegate to State Conference. All Queensland-based parliamentary members (at both state and federal levels) have full voting rights.

Central Council

Central Council, which comprises some 150 delegates, meets at least four (4) times per year. Apart from administrative functions, Central Council is responsible for receiving and debating policy resolutions of lesser significance; it also has the final responsibility in the selection of candidates. The chairman of each State Electorate Council or Federal Divisional Council is automatically a delegate to the Central Council. The Women's Section and the Young Nationals have representation in their own right. All members of the parliamentary party, at either federal or state level, are members of Central Council.

State Management Committee

The State Management Committee, which meets monthly, manages the day-to-day affairs of the party. It comprises the party's state president, two senior vice-presidents, fourteen zone vice-presidents, a number of members who are elected by the State Conference as its representatives on State Management Committee, and the leader of the state parliamentary party; one representative from each of the state and federal parliamentary parties is also appointed.

State Electorate Councils

Each State Electorate Council consists of delegates elected from each branch (including Women and Young Nationals as well as the senior branches) in the relevant State electorate. Each such Electorate Council is responsible for campaigning and electorate administration. General policy resolutions are ratified at each Electorate Council and then forwarded to either Central Council or State Conference.
Party Policy Committees

As at early 1989 there were twenty-seven (27) Party Policy Committees and a further four (4) Special Purpose Sub-Committees. The Party Policy Committees were as follows: Aboriginal and Island Affairs (chaired by Lady Pearl Logan); Ageing (Dr Dermot Lynch); Communications (Eric Powne); Conservation and Environment (Geoff Colless); Arts and Heritage (Mike Evans); Defence (Bob Katter Snr.); Education (Craig Sherrin until his appointment as a state government Minister. Chairmanship subsequently vacant); Employment, Training and Vocational Education (Huan Fraser); Fishing (Senator Ron Boswell); Health (Dr Dermot Lynch); Housing, Industry and Urban Land (Ernie Kingston); Immigration (Mendy Campbell); Industrial Relations (Hugh Bowers); Industry, Commerce and Economics (Keith Stenhouse); Justice (Bernard Ponting); Lands (Sir Robert Sparkes); Local Government (Eric Powne); Minerals and Energy (Tony White); Primary Industries (Alan Shannon); Science and Technology (Graham Smith); Small Business (Ian Thomas); Social Welfare (David Grace); Sport (Mick Veivers); Tourism (Paul Neville); Transport (Leo Gately); Water Resources (Roy Stainkey); and Works (Alan Butler). The four Special Purpose Sub-Committees were as follows: Horticultural (chaired by Len Stephan); Meat (John Bell); Drug (Mendy Campbell); and Youth Affairs (Russell Schroter).
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Space for sale inside Queensland’s Maltese cross was sold to Japan

Censorship blinds even the worthy knights

The Banana Republic bunch

Strangled by the knot of government red tape

Saintly image of the politician covers not a sacred cow but a lot of bull

White Shoe Brigade’s stork means Big Business on the beach

Motto: for government contracts only legal tender accepted

Kingaroy: prosperous capital of Australia’s peanut empire
Queensland is Australia's most volatile and dramatic political arena. Since the revelations of the Fitzgerald Inquiry and the decline and fall of Sir Johannes Bjelke-Petersen, the networks of power politics in this northern state seem to have fundamentally changed. But have they?

Peter Coaldrake, a respected political commentator, analyses:

- the use and abuse of traditional political structures
- how the one-party state evolved
- the politicisation of police and other public servants
- meddling in the judiciary
- creative electoral malapportionment
- the lack of an effective Opposition
- a generally docile and permissive media

Cover design and illustration by Jan Bryant, featuring a mock state coat of arms. For an explanation of its heraldic significance see inside back cover.