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For Peter, Andrew, Kylie
and Xavier
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INTRODUCTION

When I contacted Allen Callaghan, Sir Johannes Bjelke-Petersen’s former news and information officer, regarding an interview, he asked: ‘Are you writing “Jackboots Bjelke” or “Saint Joh”?’ These two contrasting images are indicative of the strong feelings that populist leaders such as Bjelke-Petersen inspire. Presenting ‘a true history’ of any person’s life and career is difficult, but it is made even more so in the case of a polarising leader like Bjelke-Petersen. The inquiring author is presented with numerous sincerely held but conflicting interpretations of the subject’s character and behaviour. It may occasionally be the case that an author approaches a subject in a totally disinterested fashion, with no preconceived ideas or opinions. This was not my experience. I was born in Queensland, lived in the state for most of the nineteen-year Bjelke-Petersen premiership and had strong opinions about him. I was driven to explore his premiership not because I admired him but because I wanted to know how and why he achieved repeated success at the polls and considerable personal popularity despite the authoritarian nature of his leadership, his government’s contempt for parliament and due process, and a steady trickle of allegations of corruption and conflict of interest.

At the end of a number of years study, I have not changed my initial assessment of his premiership. His was an authoritarian and undemocratic regime, and one that harmed many people. What I have been compelled to do, however, is to acknowledge and try to take account of alternative perceptions and his disarming qualities. His former staff remain immensely loyal; I found him courteous and helpful; friends
and acquaintances tell stories that illustrate his down-home charm. One of my favourites was told by the late Andrew Olle, who, as a television reporter on the Queensland edition of ‘This Day Tonight’, accompanied Bjelke-Petersen on a flight to the Torres Strait. Andrew, a journalist who had made programs critical of the Bjelke-Petersen government — and intended to do so again if circumstances demanded it — mentioned that he would be making an early start the next day. Next morning the Premier appeared at his door bearing a cup of tea. Such gestures, of course, make it hard to be a harsh critic, and there may be an element of design in these small courtesies offered to journalists and visiting academics. My impression is that Bjelke-Petersen was manipulative from the beginning of his political career, despite his guileless persona. It is likely, though, that kindnesses such as bringing a cup of tea were just that. He had been brought up to be courteous, and where nothing much was at stake continued to be so. In the political realm, however, he was an authoritarian who treated democratic values with contempt, but he did so with the acquiescence, if not the support, of the Queensland people. Despite criticism of the government and opposition from various groups, there was a high degree of congruence between the attitudes and expectations of the Queensland community and the values and performance of the Bjelke-Petersen government.

Bjelke-Petersen grew up in the rural South Burnett, an area of small farms and businesses which to this day remains fertile ground for populism. He was the middle child of Danish immigrants but the values and attitudes he acquired in childhood were consistent with those of the broader Queensland community. In his case, the various agencies of socialisation were mutually reinforcing. His family was religious and conservative. In their different ways, his parents were strong influences. As is the case with many children, he shared his parents’ party allegiance. He appears to have imitated his father’s authoritarianism, while rejecting his bookishness in favour of his mother’s strong work ethic and pragmatism. As he aged, he became more like his father, flying into ‘rages and insisting that his will be done. As a young man he was motivated by his family’s poverty to expand from farming into earth moving, other entrepreneurial activities and, eventually, politics. Additional spurs may have been a
desire to compensate for his immigrant status and the effects of childhood polio.

Because Bjelke-Petersen combined a strong work ethic with an ascetic life-style some commentators have analysed him in Calvinist terms. He was, however, a Lutheran and thus rejected works as the means of salvation. Queensland Lutheranism, though, had been corrupted by pietism which places strong emphasis on personal asceticism and individual moral reformation. In rural Queensland, the doctrines central to classical Lutheranism were either poorly taught or misunderstood, so to suggest, as some have, that Bjelke-Petersen was influenced in an authoritarian direction by Luther’s doctrine of the Two Kingdoms, is misguided. Bjelke-Petersen’s religious training left him with an emphasis on personal piety, a firm belief in his own rectitude and a conviction that he was carrying out God’s will. Thus armed, he felt no need for, and indeed was offended by, the checks and balances of a parliamentary democracy.

Education at the local state primary school, with its emphasis on discipline, order and skill development, reinforced the values acquired from family and religion. Bjelke-Petersen, never more than an average student, missed a year’s schooling when he contracted polio. He failed to catch up and, like many rural children, left school early to work full-time on the family farm. He added contract ploughing to his work load, and then scrub clearing and aerial spraying. By the time he was thirty, Bjelke-Petersen was a prosperous farmer and businessman.

At this time, according to Bjelke-Petersen, he had no political ambitions. Nevertheless, in 1946 he was persuaded to stand for the state parliament by his mentor and local federal member, Charles Adermann. There is evidence to suggest, however, that two years earlier he had contested a Country Party plebiscite for the state seat of Nanango against the sitting member. He was unsuccessful but that failure has been expunged from published accounts in favour of his recruitment by Adermann. Throughout his political career Bjelke-Petersen continued to present himself as the reluctant and accidental candidate, but this was a fiction. Although politics is too unpredictable for any politician to plot an undeviating course, Bjelke-Petersen seized opportunity whenever it presented and held tenaciously to
power. A reluctant politician may have given up when a ministry took so long to come, been less diligent in building support once that ministry was his, given way when threatened by a party room ‘coup’ in which the numbers were against him, and retired graciously when it was clear that both the organisational and parliamentary wings of the party wanted him to go. Bjelke-Petersen did none of these things, but remained convinced that his own leadership was essential to the well-being of the state, if not the nation.

For a professional politician, the socialisation associated with political activity is very important. Bjelke-Petersen entered the Queensland Parliament as an Opposition backbencher. The Labor Premier at the time was Ned Hanlon, an autocrat with a confrontationist style, defender of Queensland against southern interests and the politician responsible for introducing the zonal electoral system to Queensland. Hanlon was succeeded by Vince Gair, another autocrat. For the second time Bjelke-Petersen was presented with an authoritarian model of the premiership. The Gair government fell in 1957 to be replaced by a Coalition government led by Frank Nicklin. Although Nicklin appeared to break the mould of autocratic premiers, he, too, was a tough and effective politician, ready to take a confrontationist stand on industrial and civil liberties issues. Under the premierships of all three men, police corruption was a fact of life, and politicians combined business and parliamentary activities unconcerned by potential conflicts of interest.

Once his party obtained power, Bjelke-Petersen nursed ministerial ambitions, but he was passed over on a number of occasions until 1963 when Nicklin appointed him Minister for Works and Housing. This was a fortuitous appointment because of the opportunity it gave for doing favours. His colleagues, he told me, ‘came ... like bees to a honey-pot’, and, despite his low public profile, elected him Deputy Premier in 1968. Later that year he became Premier when the incumbent, Jack Pizzey, died of a heart attack. Bjelke-Petersen, maintaining the fiction of reluctant candidate, claimed it never occurred to him that he would one day be premier. Pizzey, however, had already had one heart attack and there had been speculation that ill health might force him to retire. It seems unlikely that Bjelke-Petersen gave no thought at all to the state’s ultimate political prize.
It took him some time to find his feet as Premier, but once he did, it was clear that Queensland had another premier cast in the authoritarian mould. His management of cabinet and parliament demonstrated his quest for autonomy, intolerance of opposition and disregard for the checks and balances that a parliamentary system is supposed to provide. More often than not, cabinet functioned as a rubber stamp for his views, despite the occasional opposition of some of his Liberal coalition partners. Ignoring their concerns, he thrived on confrontation and was the driving force behind government decisions such as the declaration of a State of Emergency during the 1971 Springbok tour, the banning of street marches and the mass sacking, in 1985, of striking South East Queensland Electricity Board employees.

Throughout his premiership there was a steady stream of allegations of conflict of interest, impropriety and police corruption. None prevented his re-election on seven occasions. At each election a skilful campaign would point to the state's booming economy and the Premier's role in fostering development. With economic development as his major policy priority, Bjelke-Petersen left routine administration to the bureaucrats. He did, however, intervene frequently on behalf of special interests or in pursuit of those he perceived as opponents. Such intervention led to politicisation of the public service, conflict of interest and the routinisation of corruption. Nowhere was this more pronounced than in the Queensland Police Force. Throughout his premiership and beyond, Bjelke-Petersen denied knowing anything about corruption but the evidence suggests that this is untrue. He ignored it because to acknowledge its presence was to hand a weapon to his political enemies and because he was prepared to trade off corruption for police loyalty.

Although Bjelke-Petersen is reluctant to share the credit for his success with anyone else, for most of the premiership he was guided by a small team of advisers with good strategic and tactical skills. The most significant of these was National Party president Sir Robert Sparkes. Theirs was a formidable partnership which, in 1983, culminated in the return of a National Party government in its own right. The two men were never close, however, and over time their relationship deteriorated. The Premier turned increasingly to followers who flattered him and encouraged his ambitions. The success that
he and Sparkes had worked towards sowed the seeds of his eventual downfall. Aided by the 1985 redistribution, the Nationals also won the 1986 election in their own right, a feat which prompted Bjelke-Petersen, increasingly isolated from organisational and bureaucratic advice, to set his sights on Canberra. The failure of this ill-advised assault on the prime-ministership, together with the establishment, in his absence, of the Fitzgerald Inquiry in 1987, signalled the end of his premiership.

Notes
1. Throughout this book I use the term ‘Bjelke-Petersen’ to refer to Sir Joh. This avoids the necessity of distinguishing between the periods before and after he was knighted in 1984. Other members of the Bjelke-Petersen family are referred to either by their full names or their first names.
CHAPTER 1

THE FAMILY

A LTHOUGH the values and attitudes acquired in childhood are extremely important, they are not immutable. Attitudes towards a political system are usually revised in response to particular events throughout life and in accord with individual dispositions. For these reasons, the political self is never ‘finalised’ and alters over a lifetime in response to experience of the political system. What happens is that ‘the political marks on the tabula rasa are entered early and are continually refurbished thereafter’. In the case of political activists like Bjelke-Petersen, political socialisation intensifies through increasing participation. For professional politicians, adult socialisation is much more important than the shaping of political attitudes that occurs in childhood. Generally speaking, whereas attitudes and judgments about specific policies appear to be best explained by adult experience, early socialisation shapes basic dispositions and outlooks.

Bjelke-Petersen’s early socialisation occurred in rural Queensland. His family, religion, education and occupation all shaped the man he was to become. Constructing an account of these influences must inevitably be somewhat speculative for two main reasons. First, it is impossible to measure accurately the influence of these various socialising agencies. It is extremely difficult, for example, to disassociate the effects of schooling from the changes associated with physical and cognitive maturation. A further difficulty occurs in attempting to isolate family influence from socioeconomic factors such as social strata and place of residence. It is not easy to gauge whether agreement between parents and children is a result of
parental influence or shared socioeconomic environment. With a religious family like Bjelke-Petersen’s, the impact of religion is hard to isolate from the impact of a pious family, especially when it tends to push in the same direction as religion. In Bjelke-Petersen’s case, the complexities are amplified by the fact that it is almost ninety years since he arrived in Australia. Influential people have died; memories have faded; much useful information has been destroyed and that which remains is patchy. Nevertheless, sufficient information exists to construct an account of influences and their possible impacts, and to establish that those that shaped him were cumulative rather than contradictory. The values given to him by his family were reinforced by church, school and occupation.

In numerous accounts of political socialisation, the family takes pre-eminent position, although some doubt has been cast on this assumption by findings that suggest little correlation between the attitudes of parents and children on a range of issues. Occasionally, in the case of the rebellious child, the family impact is a negative one. In two key areas, however, there is widespread agreement on family influence. There is a substantial body of evidence that suggests a high degree of correspondence between the party loyalties of parents and children. In addition, it appears likely that the family directly or indirectly transmits fundamental beliefs about authority, trust, efficacy and morality which in turn are transferred to the political system. In the words of one commentator, ‘the sources of political socialisation (may) lie less in the classroom and more in the home, less in what is taught than in how a child is treated, less in civics and more in the subtle communication of interpersonal relations’. The family also affects the impact of other agencies by deciding on schooling, place of residence and choice of books and newspapers. In circumstances where parents agree and where beliefs and behaviours are frequently reinforced, as was the case in Bjelke-Petersen’s family, these characteristics are more likely to be reproduced by the offspring. Bjelke-Petersen shared his father’s party political allegiance, authoritarianism, and, in his later years, his quick temper. From his general family circumstances came an acceptance of a patriarchal power structure, the courtesy which many who have met him recall, pragmatism paired with anti-intellectualism, and a desire to ‘better himself’.
through hard work. In the last, he was undoubtedly allied with his mother, and in doing so rejected his father's and brother's bookish interests.

Bjelke-Petersen was the middle child of Danish-born parents. His father, Carl, known to the family as George, emigrated to Tasmania with his family when he was twenty-two years old. He had qualified as a school teacher in Denmark, and taught at Scotch College in Hobart, but he did not stay long in his profession, choosing instead to join the church. Bjelke-Petersen's cousin, Les Hoey, says that in family circles his ordination was viewed negatively. George's sister, Marie, became an author and his other brothers operated a well-known gymnasium in Sydney. George was ordained as a Lutheran pastor and posted to New Zealand in 1893. From New Zealand, where he had resigned his post 'because of a misunderstanding’, he was sent to Kangaroo Point, Brisbane.12

Bjelke-Petersen's mother, Maren Poulsen, was seven and a half years old when she arrived in Queensland with her family, who eventually settled in the South Burnett district in southern Queensland. By 1901 Queensland accounted for more than half of Australia's Danes, many of whom had been attracted by free and assisted passages and the prospect of land grants upon arrival.13 Most of the Scandinavian immigrants were Lutheran, and from his base in Brisbane George Bjelke-Petersen ministered to their religious needs. His flock included the congregation at Edenvale in the South Burnett where he met his wife-to-be. The Queensland congregation was not, however, affiliated with any of the Lutheran Churches in Australia, but with the Scandinavian Lutheran Church in New Zealand, so that in 1903 George was posted again to New Zealand where he and Maren married.14 Their first two children, Christian and Johannes, were born there, at Dannevirke in the North Island. A daughter, Agneta, was born when they returned to Australia, in 1913, when Bjelke-Petersen was two years old. Their return was prompted by the deteriorating health of George Bjelke-Petersen which had caused him to forsake the ministry for sheep farming 'to try to regain his strength'.15 The climate of New Zealand, however, proved too harsh for the ailing George, and the family came back to Australia to establish a farm,
‘Bethany’, near Kingaroy, where Maren’s relations could help them get established.

Bjelke-Petersen refers in his autobiography to his father’s ‘fragile’ health and an operation for goitre. He does not suggest that his father’s health problems were other than physical, but George Bjelke-Petersen’s description of a profound crisis of faith during his first tour of duty in New Zealand indicates that he suffered from depression. Like Luther as a young priest, George was beset by doubt and distress. In a yearly report in 1896, he wrote:

As long as we honestly wish to obey God’s will, then God in time and with His ways will send help. With the aid of the Cross He will break the rigid unbreakable will and disintegrate everything that would hinder us . . .

In this recently passed year, it has saddened the Lord to place such a Cross upon my shoulders. The Lord knew how much I lacked in obeying His will and in His wisdom He knew the time was right to open my eyes. Now was the right time. The cluster of grapes was ripe, therefore he cut it off and threw it in the winepress so that the grapes could be crushed and transformed into good wine. It is painful to be crushed, it is painful to become less than nothing. But it is necessary . . . In the period before Christmas, I encountered many events. I did not understand why God asked these thorns to grow on my track, in the end they became too sharp, and I was frightened to continue my walk and truly thought in my heart, that it was God’s will that I should discontinue my work in his vineyard and I did this the following Sunday to the surprise of the Congregation. Contrary to my expectations, this change did not bring freedom of the Cross — on the contrary I became even more unhappy.

George Bjelke-Petersen asked his congregation for their forgiveness and returned to the pulpit and declared himself ‘well in soul and body’. His later history, however, suggests that this happy state did not last.

Most accounts of Bjelke-Petersen’s family portray his father as a scholarly, well-educated man who spoke five languages. Bjelke-Petersen says that his father ‘had studied at Copenhagen and at Heidelberg’ and ‘was a city man and an academic through and through’. As Premier, he was reported in the Sunday Sun as saying: ‘My father was a very learned man. He’d been to Heidelberg
University in Germany until he was 22 and spoke different languages.\footnote{20} In a 1988 videotape interview he claimed that his father attended university at Copenhagen and Heidelberg.\footnote{21} Derek Townsend throws a slightly different light on George Bjelke-Petersen's education. (His account is confirmed in the biography of Marie Bjelke-Petersen.)\footnote{22} As Bjelke-Petersen's authorised biographer, Townsend had access to Bjelke-Petersen family letters and documents, so that despite its sycophantic tone it is the best documented account of the Bjelke-Petersen family history. Although George had spent time in Meissen and Heidelberg in his early years, and received further schooling in Meissen, at the age of fifteen he was apprenticed to a cellar master in Heidelberg. Ill health forced a return to Denmark where his schooling was completed at Jonstrup Seminary, a teacher training academy in Copenhagen. The Dean and Director of the Seminary testified that George Bjelke-Petersen:

> has with great diligence, conscientious earnestness and a lively interest availed himself of the instruction of the seminary. By his exactitude in studying, his attention to all details and possessing already by a sojourn abroad, an intellect of a proportionally uncommon extent he has not only gathered up a not ordinary share of knowledge, not a little surpassing the more limited sphere demanded for the examination, but he has appropriated himself of this knowledge with a rare trustiness, with a complete and clear understanding and preserved in a faithful memory what he has learned ...\footnote{23}

George Bjelke-Petersen's education recommenced, when, prior to his ordination, he studied theology with an older pastor in Tasmania for ten months, an exceptionally short period, even in nineteenth-century terms, that may have been 'less than adequate'.\footnote{24} Although George Bjelke-Petersen was well educated by the standards of the time, he appears not have the university education that his son has sometimes claimed for him. The testimonial from his Dean, with its emphasis on diligence and the committing of knowledge to memory, suggests an education designed to produce conformity rather than enquiry. His collection of Zane Grey adventure novels,\footnote{25} coincidentally recommended by Ronald Reagan for their traditional values,\footnote{26} suggests less than highbrow tastes. The fact that no substantive
references to Carl/George Bjelke-Petersen can be found in either the Australian or New Zealand Lutheran archives, nor in the Dannevirke library, indicates that it is unlikely that he contributed to theological debate or speculation. The evidence suggests that his education was not the kind to lead to liberal or unconventional views.

By all accounts George Bjelke-Petersen was a rigid conservative with a tendency towards authoritarianism. Even his son acknowledged that ‘Father was by nature a conservative man’. Les Hoey recalls that the whole family supported ‘George’s view of the world’. ‘He was a powerful force in the family … Daddy, as they called him, controlled everything, including finance.’ Until he was married, Bjelke-Petersen had to ask his father if he could buy a new plough or other farm equipment. According to Bjelke-Petersen, ‘Father’s message was to be strong in discipline and strong in faith.’ His teaching focused strongly on sin and Jesus as our saviour. Life was austere, with no drinking, smoking, dancing or working on the Sabbath, and exhortations ‘that the spiritual side is really much more important than the material side’. There was a daily reading from the New Testament and church on Sunday. Maren Bjelke-Petersen taught Sunday School classes and Christian led a home bible-study group. Such godliness may have been the product of conservative and pietistic influences which were strong in the New Zealand Scandinavian Lutheran Church. It was certainly not universal among Scandinavian immigrants to Australia and New Zealand. The Brisbane Scandinavian community enjoyed Saturday evening dances which continued ‘sometimes well into the Sabbath day’. The Scandinavian Society in Sydney held a boat trip on the Harbour at which chicken was served from baskets and beer and wine flowed so freely that the Society’s finances never recovered. The majority of Scandinavian pioneers in New Zealand reportedly demonstrated a ‘regrettable … lack of interest in spiritual things’. George Bjelke-Petersen complained of the lack of enthusiasm for worship among the Danish families in the Makaretu Congregation in New Zealand, a sentiment that became especially pronounced on those Sundays when the weather was beautiful.

In an attempt to combat declining attendance, George Bjelke-Petersen increased the number of services conducted in English. In
doing so, he hoped ‘to reach the so-called “Scandinavian” youth [which had] an unexplainable dislike towards the language its fathers loved so dearly’. Maren Bjelke-Petersen, who began speaking English as an eight-year-old was similarly supportive of the substitution of English for Danish in her own congregation because of the barriers the use of Danish placed between immigrants and native-born and between the various language groups of the Lutheran Church. Despite his acceptance of English-language sermons, George Bjelke-Petersen, who had a thick Scandinavian accent, insisted that Danish be spoken in his own household. This was unusual because Scandinavian immigrants assimilated swiftly and ‘in Australia, it is quite an exceptional occurrence for the Scandinavian language to be passed on to the second generation, even where both parents are Scandinavians’. In order to promote Sunday School attendance among the children of Scandinavian immigrants, ‘few of whom had learned the language of their ancestors’, Luther’s catechism had to be translated into English for use in the Queensland diocese. English was adopted as the language of worship at Edenvale in 1920, which suggests that even in this community Danish was dying out. The language shift towards English was hastened by the anti-German feeling which gripped Australia during the years of the First World War and which often extended to Scandinavians. In addition, both officially and unofficially it was deemed desirable that immigrants assimilate and assume the characteristics of native-born Australians. The fact that the Bjelke-Petersen children’s first language remained Danish in this environment suggests a conscious attempt to conserve links with the past, especially on the part of their father, a high degree of isolation which prevented ready assimilation, and an imposition on the family of the language George was most comfortable with, or, as is most likely, a combination of the three. Bjelke-Petersen records that his father was ‘very proud of his Danish roots and thought we ought to value our Danish heritage, too, and he would get very angry if we said anything critical about Denmark’. The family’s retention of the Danish language was aided by its isolation. After his operation for goitre, George Bjelke-Petersen was left with a nervous twitch which made him self-conscious and reclusive. He ceased to participate in the life of the congregation to
which he had once ministered. It is likely, given his history, that he continued to suffer from a troubled mind and spirit. Bjelke-Petersen refers obliquely to 'the other troubles in his life'. Les Hoey recalls that George 'could fly into a rage, so they built a separate little house away from the main house where they could look after him'. Despite his isolation, he still managed to impose his will on the family, as his insistence on the retention of Danish demonstrates. Les Hoey recalls that Bethany was 'a place where Uncle could not tolerate noise and where I had to be very careful of my behaviour'. Their home 'had this funereal tone to it'. Apart from visits to and from relatives, the need to work hard and the lack of income kept the family socially isolated and unlikely ever to be exposed to alternative views. The only respite was church and related activities, which, given the overwhelming evidence that regular church attenders are more conservative than non-attenders, was only likely to reinforce family beliefs.

George Bjelke-Petersen's conservatism was reflected in his politics in which he was, according to his son, 'particularly interested'. Poor health made political participation difficult for George, but it permitted time for reading, speculation and the frequent household political discussion that he led. There is no indication that Maren Bjelke-Petersen did not support her husband's views. Indeed, in such a traditional family it would be most unusual for a wife to disagree. Bjelke-Petersen remembers:

Father was particularly interested in politics, and from time to time I heard him discussing with Mother different aspects of the government's activities — for example, I can remember when the government introduced a 3d in the pound unemployment relief tax. Father was angry because he said it would become part of the tax system and would increase. He was right. I can remember him discussing it again years later when it had reached 1/3d in the pound.

According to Bjelke-Petersen, most of his information on politics came from his father. So, too, did his opinion of the Labor Party and his Country Party allegiance:

I grew up with a complete distrust of Labor governments, following no doubt my Father's attitude — they never had anything for the poverty-stricken country people ... My father believed that the Country Party
was the only party that took a broader approach to life and people’s problems overall.50

This family background, where politics was discussed and political allegiances were known, probably predisposed Bjelke-Petersen towards a political career, but Bjelke-Petersen attributes his decision to enter parliament not to his father but to the influence of Sir Charles Adermann, fellow lay-preacher and the local federal member and Minister for Primary Industries.51 Les Hoey, however, confirms George Bjelke-Petersen’s influence on his son’s politics and says that ‘in a sense Joh has become the public mouthpiece for what was the very private life of his father’.52 Hoey believes that his cousin had a mission to carry his father’s view of life to the masses. Unlike many second sons who rebel against the double authority of father and elder brother, Bjelke-Petersen never overtly rebelled against his father’s basic conservative values or his partisan affiliation.53 Instead, Bjelke-Petersen ‘put his father up on a pedestal’. Any resentment about his father’s inability to work hard remained buried and unconscious, although there is a hint of disapproval in his description of his father as a ‘city man and an academic’. In an era dominated by a belief in the moral and economic supremacy of rural life, to call someone by these terms was not really to flatter them, but to suggest a parasitic and, in pragmatic terms, useless existence.54 Bjelke-Petersen’s feelings on the topic are clear in his account of his older brother, Christian, who, because he was a keen student, was sent to Brisbane Grammar School although his parents ‘could hardly have afforded it’.55 According to Bjelke-Petersen:

[Christian] was never much of a help around the farm. He took after our father. He wasn’t the slightest bit interested in the farm or in sport or in anything else out of doors ... I used to try to get him to come out and help me on the farm, but he was never interested ... he would have his eye on his watch and leave the minute he could.56

Throughout his life Bjelke-Petersen showed little respect for academics and universities. Compared with ‘the School of Life, the hard knocks of life ... the average fellow who goes up to the universities and the schools ... you leave them for dead for initiative ... they are mass produced down a long line’.57 Bjelke-Petersen’s
dismissal of the value of education, as well as being representative of the values of his background, may have been sharpened by an underlying resentment of his father and/or the remnants of early sibling rivalry, neither of which he was able to express openly, the more so because of his brother’s early death aged twenty-two. Many years after both his father’s and his brother’s death, animosity towards a person who had bettered him, in this instance his successor as premier, Mike Ahern, surfaced as hostility towards education. Asked if he would have been a better leader with a university degree, he responded: ‘How much worse would I have been if I had that? The present Premier, he’s got a degree in agriculture. Let you work it out for yourself … Compare the two.’

It has been suggested that underlying feelings about his father were likely to have had their foundation in George Bjelke-Petersen’s retention of patriarchal authority despite leaving the practicalities of running a farm to his wife and middle son. According to Bjelke-Petersen, his mother did all the heavy work on the farm until he was old enough to help her and eventually take over. The weight of George’s authority was clearly felt when, even though Bjelke-Petersen ran the farm, his father refused to give it to him before he died to avoid death duties. He recalls his father saying: ‘I’m not going to give the property to Joh before I die. I don’t know who you are going to marry and I’m not going to be kicked out and all this sort of stuff …’

This situation undoubtedly fuelled Bjelke-Petersen’s later desire to rid the state of death duties. The lack of trust shown by his father must have been hurtful and the twenty years it took to pay the duties may have caused resentment to simmer. In addition, if George’s illness was not entirely physical, in an era when mental illness was frequently misunderstood and stigmatised, Bjelke-Petersen may have felt that his father was malingering. The fact that George Bjelke-Petersen’s immediate family made no direct reference to his ‘breakdown’ suggests a reluctance to confront the problem, possibly associated with feelings of embarrassment.

Nevertheless, although the workload divisions in the Bjelke-Petersen household differed from the conventional pattern because of George’s poor health, the power structure remained traditional and
was consistent with the Australian pattern where ‘the Australian mother is chief executive, doing everything, often without help from her husband … [she] is skilled and energetic but powerless, or powerful only in lesser matters’. 62

In rural Australia during the first half of the twentieth century, suggestions of wifely dominance were especially frowned upon and sons who worked on the family farm did not challenge their father’s authority. 63 Bjelke-Petersen submitted, but the resulting resentment of his lack of autonomy may have influenced his behaviour as premier in an authoritarian direction:

Having been at the mercy of a (resented) patriarch for so long, he later refused to be accountable to anyone: rather than explaining himself or answering questions, he demanded to be taken on trust. In fact as Premier he himself played the strong patriarch, and on a grand scale. 64

Other possible psychological explanations have been provided. It has been argued that children brought up in oppressive situations will have a tendency to overcome their childhood defeat by ‘doing actively what one was forced to endure passively: to rule when one had to obey; to beat when one was beaten; in short, to do what one was forced to suffer.’ 65 A different approach suggests that dominating behaviour may have its origins not in resentment but in imitation: because of boys’ need to identify with their fathers ‘the stage is set for the admiration of mantle-like authority and the equation of office (father or premier) with power.’ 66 Les Hoey uses almost identical terms to describe Bjelke-Petersen’s relationship with his father: ‘Job has taken the mantle of authority worn by his father until Joh was well into his forties.’ Further, ‘when Daddy died … Joh became like the big daddy and treated everyone like children … particularly as he got older he’s got more into his father’s mould’.

The longer Bjelke-Petersen remained as premier, the more pronounced became the equation of office with power. Whenever attempts were made to constrain him, his resentment of the perpetrator was profound, as his feelings about the National Party president Sir Robert Sparkes, the State Governor Sir Walter Campbell and political rival Mike Ahern demonstrate. It is not inconceivable that attempts to make him submit to another’s will evoked memories of
his father's power, as something to be resented and/or as something to be imitated. Diffuse feelings of resentment, which surfaced as hostility towards those who did not share his values and opinions, appear never to have left him. In turn, his own brand of populist politics allowed his supporters to vent their own feelings of resentment against various outsiders.

Unlike his father, Bjelke-Petersen’s mother, Maren, earned his unalloyed respect. He still called her ‘Mummy’ when she was in her eighties. She was, in his words, ‘like a bright and steady beacon’, a hard worker who was up before daylight to cook breakfast, still up at midnight, if needs be, ‘with the fire going and a hot meal on the table and fresh clothes, cleaned and pressed’. In her devotion to duty and commitment to toil, Maren seems to have followed in the footsteps of her own mother, Agneta, who, as a bush nurse in the Kingaroy district, combined the duties of a midwife with those of a housemaid and washerwoman. These pioneering women served as models for the women Bjelke-Petersen was later closest to, such as his sister, Neta, who was his business partner and confidante for many years. Like his mother, Neta encouraged and helped him, persuading him to study by correspondence and joining him on the local debating team. When he was elected to the Kingaroy Shire Council in 1946, Neta was appointed to join him on the Library Committee and the pair were commissioned to select library books to the value of 50 pounds. Bjelke-Petersen’s subsequent relationships with ‘supportive and influential female loyalists’ like his wife, and pilot Beryl Young, can perhaps be traced to the positive relationships he had with his mother and sister. The women in his family disposed him towards competent and practical women. In his autobiography he recalls being impressed by Florence Gilmour’s ‘brisk, efficient way’ as a secretary and by Beryl Young’s performance of her duties as a pilot with ‘a degree of skill, efficiency, safety, punctuality and plain good sense that would have been hard to match’. According to Allen Callaghan, Bjelke-Petersen’s news and information officer from 1971 to 1979, ‘Florence and later Beryl Young had the same attributes [as his mother] and could dress the Premier down and make demands that would not be tolerated from a man’.

From his family and their rural background he also acquired the
courtesy and charm that many who knew him comment upon. Even well-known Labor staffer Bob Ellis found ‘the eerie charm, the hypnotism … the disarming courtesy for which he is justly famed’ seductive.\textsuperscript{75} Long after his demise as premier, Bjelke-Petersen retained the intense loyalty and admiration of public servants like Sir Leo Hielscher and of personal staff like Allen Callaghan and Beryl Young, whom he treated as family or part of an extended clan. Callaghan returns to this attribute often:

How many times have you heard anybody ever betray a trust with Joh? Not one, and he has a lot of staff. He has had a lot of employees, a big family, and not one of them has ever spoken against him in public.\textsuperscript{76}

As Bjelke-Petersen grew older, he took on more of the farm work. Failure to pass the state Scholarship examination at age fourteen precipitated full-time work on the farm. His successful management of the enterprise gave him a self-confidence that never deserted him. It also filled him with a desire to escape from poverty. This urge to make money sat uncomfortably with family teachings about the moral dangers of wealth\textsuperscript{77} and caused his cousin, Les Hoey, to speculate that from his early years Bjelke-Petersen was able to isolate the religious and the secular in separate realms.\textsuperscript{78} His brother, Christian, before he died in 1929, echoed his father’s words about the temptations of the material world: ‘Joh, never go over to the world. Never sell your soul for filthy lucre.’\textsuperscript{79} Bjelke-Petersen himself claimed that ‘I am one of those people who believe life has much more to it than the material’.\textsuperscript{80} It is instructive, however, that Bjelke-Petersen’s childhood heroes were Henry Ford and R. G. Le Tourneau, the personifications of the self-made men who built fortunes without the benefits of formal education.\textsuperscript{81} Ford, from a rural Methodist background, remained rurally oriented all his life and was never converted to the cause of education, unless it had a practical bias.\textsuperscript{82} He refused to allow his son, Edsel, to go to college and rejected reading books on the grounds that ‘they muss up my mind’.\textsuperscript{83} In his book, \textit{My Life and Work}, which impressed Bjelke-Petersen so much, Ford constantly reiterates the importance of work and suggests that:

Being greedy for money is the surest way not to get it, but when one serves for the sake of service — for the satisfaction of doing that which
one believes to be right — then money abundantly takes care of itself. Money comes naturally as the result of service.84

Le Tourneau’s philosophy was similar. He was an inventor of heavy earthmoving equipment, a multi-millionaire as a result of his inventions, founder of the Le Tourneau Technical Institute and author of God Runs My Business. He described himself as ‘a sinner saved by grace. Just a mechanic that the Lord has blessed’.85 Further, ‘we do not give to God because it pays, but it does pay to give to God and to serve Him faithful [sic]’.86 In the Australian context, Bjelke-Petersen confessed to having greater admiration for Lang Hancock and Les Thiess than for Alan Bond. Whereas Bond’s wealth came from ‘investment and acquisition’, Hancock and Thiess had ‘with the sweat of their brow built their mining and construction businesses from nothing’.87

Bjelke-Petersen followed in his heroes’ entrepreneurial footsteps by building up a contract harvesting and earthmoving business to the point where he claimed to be making more money in a day than his parents did in a year on their farm.88

His success seemed to bear out the advice of Norman Vincent Peale whose Power of Positive Thinking, ‘a book which teaches effective living through right thinking and practical religious faith’,89 was another Bjelke-Petersen favourite.90 The same materialist philosophy underpins modern religious fundamentalism and guided Bjelke-Petersen, who, throughout his parliamentary career, continued his involvement in various entrepreneurial ventures seemingly oblivious to conflicts of interest. His pleasure seemed to come from making money rather than spending it. As premier, he continued to live in the modest brick farmhouse that he built on his marriage to Florence Gilmour. Although he eventually acquired a taste for wine, he remained a modest and plain eater. Hugh Bingham, his first media adviser, describes his astonishment at his new employer’s fare:

I was sitting in the nice little premier’s dining room and the cook came in with this beautiful tureen. The table was beautifully set with wine glasses and he lifted up the top of the tureen and it was boiled pumpkin and potatoes. Beautifully set out. They were just flawless. Absolutely flawless pumpkins and potatoes.91
Such a combination of diligence and frugality was characteristic of Calvinism, but Bjelke-Petersen, as a Lutheran, could not have believed, as Calvinists do and as Ford and Peale did in their different ways, in salvation linked with work.

Notes
12. ‘Pioneers of Lutheranism in New Zealand’, Christensen family manuscripts, National Library of New Zealand, Wellington, ch. 2, p. 3. The manuscript does not elaborate on the nature of the misunderstanding.
15. J. Bjelke-Petersen, *Don't You Worry About That! The Joh Bjelke-Petersen Memoirs*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1990, p. 8. The belief in the therapeutic powers of farming was characteristic of an era in which the loss of an eye or a leg did not disqualify returning soldiers from settlement on the land. Indeed one returning soldier who had been 'terribly knocked about... blind in one eye and was nearly blown to atoms' was described by the Minister for Repatriation as 'just the man for the land'. M. Lake, *The Limits of Hope*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1987, p. 59.


27. There is some evidence that Carl Bjelke-Petersen attempted to start a newsletter while at Kangaroo Point. The Lutheran Archives in New Zealand hold a reply from a Brisbane printer and stationer to his request for information as to the cost of producing a small paper. There is no evidence that it eventuated.

28. Bjelke-Petersen, op. cit., p. 27.


30. ibid.

31. Bjelke-Petersen, op. cit., p. 11.

32. Harrison, op. cit., p. 151.


35. 'The Scandinavian Lutheran Emigration', Christensen family manuscripts, National Library of New Zealand, Wellington, p. 3.
37. ibid.
38. Maren Bjelke-Petersen, 'Church Life in Early Kingaroy' from a talk presented to the Taabinga Lutheran Ladies Guild, 19 April 1966, p. 3.
42. Koivukangas and Martin, op. cit., p. 113.
43. Bjelke-Petersen, op. cit., p. 10.
44. ibid.
45. ibid.
49. ibid.
50. ibid.
51. Bjelke-Petersen, op. cit., p. 45.
52. Les Hoey, 'Joh as Leader', p. 11.
56. ibid.
58. ‘The Joh Tapes’ op. cit.
60. Bjelke-Petersen, pers. comm., October 1993.
61. ibid.
64. J. Walter, op. cit., p. 499.

66. Little, op. cit., p. 105.


68. Bjelke-Petersen, op. cit., p. 21.


70. Minutes of the Meeting of the School of Arts Committee of the Kingaroy Shire Council, 18 September 1946.

71. Lunn, op cit., p. 27.

72. Bjelke-Petersen, op. cit., p. 57.

73. ibid., p. 128.

74. Quoted in Koch, op. cit.


76. A. Callaghan, pers. comm. All quotes from Callaghan unless otherwise indicated come from an interview I conducted with him in June 1997.

77. Bjelke-Petersen, op. cit., p. 21.


85. Le Tourneau University: http://www.letu.edu/about history/rg_let.html


87. Bjelke-Petersen, op. cit., p. 212.

88. Bjelke-Petersen, op. cit., p. 25.


91. Hugh Bingham, pers. comm. All quotes from Hugh Bingham are taken from an interview conducted in August 1997.
RELIGION played an important part in Bjelke-Petersen’s life, as it did for many rural Australians.  As Premier he continued to attend church regularly, just as he had as a child and a young man, and he commented frequently on the importance to him of daily prayer and Bible reading. As might be anticipated, this religious observance influenced him in a conservative direction. But beyond this general statement lies a great deal of confusion about the nature and significance of his Lutheran faith. This confusion occurs for two main reasons — the first in the distinction between Lutheran and Calvinist beliefs and the second in how to interpret the impact of Luther’s teaching, especially concerning the role of the state. Resolving the confusion requires the recognition of differences between classical Lutheranism and its expression in Queensland.

Bjelke-Petersen’s behaviour and his enthusiasm for the works of Henry Ford and Norman Vincent Peale seem to indicate that he was a believer in the Protestant work ethic that links hard work and success with salvation. His character appeared to be that of the classical puritan ‘who sought to master the world rather than adjust to it’.  Work was a lifelong habit and, in his years as premier, four hours sleep was usual. As a young man he lived for considerable periods of time in an old cow bail with only the most basic of facilities. By his own account, he was nearly forty before he asked a woman out, because ‘somehow work always came first’. The fit between Bjelke-Petersen’s beliefs, his lifestyle and the ascetic work ethic described by Max Weber in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism appears very close:
Waste of time is thus the first and in principle the deadliest of sins. The span of human life is infinitely short and precious to make sure of one's own election. Loss of time through sociability, idle talk, luxury, even more sleep than is necessary for health, six to at most eight hours, is worthy of absolute moral condemnation ... inactive contemplation is also valueless, or even directly reprehensible if it is at the expense of one's daily work ... Labour is ... an approved ascetic technique ... It is in particular the specific defence against all those temptations which Puritanism united under the name of the unclean life ... Along with a moderate vegetable diet and cold baths, the same prescription is given for all sexual temptations as is used against religious doubts and a sense of moral unworthiness: 'work hard in your calling'.

Because Bjelke-Petersen so clearly prioritised work and eschewed sociability, sleep, contemplation and sexual temptations, it is not surprising that some commentators analysed him in Calvinist terms. Bjelke-Petersen himself, however, knew that Luther explicitly rejected good works as a means to salvation. This could be achieved by grace and faith alone. In the premier's words, 'Faith is something you can't earn ... God's plan of salvation is there if you accept it'. More formally, the Augsburg Confession, the chief document of belief of the Australian Lutheran Church, states:

Men cannot be justified before God [coram Deo] by their own strength, merits or works, but are justified freely [gratis] through Christ by faith ... Our Churches condemn the Anabaptists and those who think that the Holy Spirit comes to men without an outward word, merely by their own preparation and works ... [Good works, which God commands of us, are the issue of faith, not the means of earning justification.]

Furthermore, Luther's Small Catechism, which has explained Church doctrine to generations of Lutheran Sunday School children, states unequivocally that the doctrine of justification by grace 'distinguishes the Christian religion from false religions, all of which teach salvation by works'. Nevertheless, although Luther was opposed to works, he was in favour of work done with faith, including such mundane tasks as piling up manure, washing babies and cleaning the house. Bjelke-Petersen's enthusiasm for work was thus not incompatible with Lutheranism and undoubtedly reflected the views of the wider rural community in which the work ethic was no longer
necessarily linked with Calvinism, nor indeed to Protestantism. For Catholics, too, in the quest for upward mobility work assumed a high priority.

The uncoupling of the work ethic from Calvinism characterises modern capitalist economies, where, Weber suggests, the work ethic has ‘escaped from the cage’ of religion and been stripped of its religious and ethical meaning. It has been extremely functional for capitalism because hard work and asceticism permit the accumulation of capital required to drive the system. Colonial Australia was no exception and the dominant social values of ‘industry, sobriety and frugality’ were taught by Catholic and Protestant alike. In pioneering economies like Queensland, both individual and social development were well served by the postponement of immediate gratification and the storing up of wealth. According to Weber, in capitalist environments religious sensibility is replaced by a ‘utilitarian worldliness’:

the bourgeois business man, as long as he remained within the bounds of formal correctness, as long as his moral conduct was spotless and the use to which he put his wealth was not objectionable, could follow his pecuniary interests as he would and feel that he was fulfilling a duty in doing so.

Indeed, entrepreneurship allowed the creation of opportunities for the unemployed and dependent to prove their own worth through frugality, sobriety and hard work. Bjelke-Petersen appears to fit this model of the ‘self-made’ businessman who is frequently admired in a materialistic society. In such an environment, there is pressure to succeed, ‘by fair means if possible and by foul means if necessary’. In a country like Australia, where utilitarianism is the dominant moral framework, the distinction between good acts and expedient ones has already been undermined. Throughout Bjelke-Petersen’s premiership, there was a widespread opinion that ‘Joh may cut a few corners, but he’s done a lot for Queensland’. In this context, it is unsurprising that Bjelke-Petersen’s behaviour appears to personify the (Protestant) work ethic. The belief in salvation by grace did not prevent him from working hard and living frugally, especially in an environment in which classical Lutheran teachings had been corrupted by pietism,
which had a strong influence on the antipodean Scandinavian Lutheran Church. Lutheran teaching in Australia and New Zealand was thus differentiated from the more worldly Lutheranism of Germany where the Church also had the advantage of establishment. In order to understand the impact of religion on Bjelke-Petersen, it is necessary to explore the difference that pietism made to classic Lutheran doctrine.

Pietism places a strong emphasis on individual moral reformation. Hedonism and those physical appetites that detract from the spiritual aspects of existence are frowned upon. In this, pietism differs from classical Lutheranism, which is not an austere religion. Luther himself wrote enthusiastically about the delights of beer and food, and Weber records that, compared with ascetic Protestantism’s emphasis on self-control and self-regulation, Lutheranism ‘left the spontaneous vitality of impulsive action and naive emotion more nearly unchanged’. In its moralistic emphasis, pietism shares some of the characteristics of fundamentalism and has been described as ‘fundamentalism’s tap roots’. This may account for the suggestion that fundamentalism pervades all denominations in Australia and accounts for their moralistic and judgmental attitudes. Australian fundamentalism, the argument contends, is associated with a simplistic focus on a few doctrines and practices that are deemed essential to salvation, and with a theological mood that is positivistic, assertive, conservative, dogmatic, authoritarian and confessional. The early pietist influence in Queensland partially explains the later success of more extreme ultra-conservative fundamentalist religions, together with Bjelke-Petersen’s affinity with them and their adherents.

Australian Lutherans, Baptists, Churches of Christ, the Reformed Church, Pentecostal groups and Assemblies of God have been classified as ‘right wing’ Protestant groups because of their conservative theology, high levels of church attendance and belief in a personal God. In addition to their conservatism, the struggle for survival in a new land, in a sometimes hostile political climate, produced in Australian Lutherans ‘a peculiar tenacity, sometimes even seen as isolated arrogance’. This characteristic was probably exacerbated by the small numbers of adherents to the Lutheran faith. In the 1921 census 4.1 per cent of Queenslanders described themselves as Lu-
theran, although the percentage for the South Burnett was 11.9 per cent.\textsuperscript{26} By 1986 the percentage of Lutherans in Queensland had declined to 1.7 per cent.\textsuperscript{27} The tiny numbers of Lutherans and their dispersal over a large number of districts meant that it was impossible for the Church to form an organisation or synod, despite early attempts to do so. The first Queensland synod was formed in 1885 and combined German and Scandinavian Lutherans. The Danish Lutherans split from this group four years later and from that point their organisational structure remained congregational.\textsuperscript{28} This meant that individual pastors and congregations followed their own religious doctrines and explains, in part, the large number of schisms and splits within the Australian Lutheran Church. For example, in 1917 there were six separate Lutheran synods in Australia.\textsuperscript{29} In Queensland:

\ldots churches sprang up like mushrooms, and it was no uncommon sight to see two or three Lutheran churches in one locality. Moreover, the shortage of pastors, too, permitted many sectarian abuses to enter the Church. Laymen preached and even women offered prayer in the services. It was also detrimental to the welfare of the Church that pastors who were unworthy of the position offered their services \ldots Lutheran consciousness was hardly to be found amongst these men. On one occasion, one of these ‘Lutheran’ pastors, conjointly with a Baptist preacher, ordained an aspirant to the ministry in the Lutheran Church!\textsuperscript{30}

It is clear that many of those who ministered in Queensland were poorly trained. In all religions, ‘levels of theological illiteracy were undoubtedly high, coupled with a tendency towards individualism in belief and practice’.\textsuperscript{31} Each congregation developed its own religious practices and interpretation of doctrine against a backdrop of pragmatic Christianity rather than informed theological discussion.\textsuperscript{32} In the early years, ‘lack of Lutheran consciousness, want of indoctrination, lack of proper organisation [and] disorderly church practices’ were among the characteristics that contributed to the ‘chaos and confusion’ of the Lutheran Church in Queensland.\textsuperscript{33} It was not until 1928 that a uniform order of service was adopted for the Queensland Lutheran Church and even then not all congregations introduced it.\textsuperscript{34} In such fluid circumstances it is understandable...
that classical Lutheranism was diluted, especially as relations between Lutheranism and other evangelical Protestant denominations were close. Maren Bjelke-Petersen remembered church services at Taabinga Village at Edenvale being conducted by Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians and Lutherans. At nearby Coolabunia, the church building was shared by Baptists, Presbyterians and the Salvation Army, although the last had to meet outside because the small building could not accommodate their brass band. At Meringandan, on the Darling Downs, a Methodist pastor served the Lutheran congregation. Such heterogeneity can be explained by the rarity of visits by clergymen to bush communities. Whenever a clergyman came to a small rural community, believers of all denominations turned up because such visitations were so spasmodic and random. In exile in Tasmania in the 1990s, Bjelke-Petersen took the same approach when, in the absence of a Lutheran Church, and despite the anti-Catholicism of his upbringing, he attended Catholic Mass.

In this context, it would be unsurprising if doctrines central to classic Lutheranism were poorly taught or misunderstood. This is especially likely in the case of Luther’s Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms that some commentators have suggested was a possible influence on Bjelke-Petersen. Luther’s Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms is complex. It asserts that the Christian lives in both the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world, which, although distinct, ‘are involved in each other and must not be separated’. So as to preserve order from the chaos created by people’s wickedness, government is necessary and people must submit to its authority. Although in his private life the Christian prince may forgive wrongdoers, as a ruler he acts as a patriarch who is forced to punish offenders in order to preserve law and order. Luther drew on the Petrine Epistles’ injunction to ‘Fear God. Honour the King’ to teach:

Because the sword is a very great benefit and necessary to the whole world, to preserve peace, to punish sin and to prevent evil, he [the Christian] submits most willingly to the rule of the sword, pays tax, honours those in authority, serves, helps and does all he can to further the government, that it may be sustained and held in honour and fear.

Opinions like these caused some theologians and critics to view
Luther as a prophet of the authoritarian state and as a forerunner of Hitler, despite the fact that Luther legitimises resistance against the state if it causes the citizen to sin. His writings on this theme were used to justify resistance against National Socialism by Lutheran martyrs such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Luther, however, is clear that there can be no support for mass rebellion against the state. Because of the bloodshed and hurt to the innocent, Luther indicated that he would always 'be on the side of those against whom insurrection is directed, no matter how unjust their cause' and that he would always oppose 'those who rise in insurrection, no matter how just their cause'.

Some interpretations of the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms suggest that it advocates separate spheres for the Church and State. Anglican clergyman and historian John Moses argues that:

In the Lutheran experience people were taught that in secular affairs the State alone virtually implemented the divine will for humankind. Consequently, it was not permitted for Christians to question or criticise the State. There was a complete separation between the secular authority of the State and the spiritual authority of the Church.

For many Lutheran theologians this is a distortion but it is one that numerous Lutherans have accepted. It is likely that poorly trained pastors isolated in remote congregations in southern Queensland so interpreted Luther. Against such a background, it is at least conceivable that some of Bjelke-Petersen's anger as premier at criticisms by the clergy and at demonstrators generally could be located in his understanding of the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. Certainly, when groups such as the Concerned Christians protested against Bjelke-Petersen's street-march legislation (1976–77), when the Archbishop of Canterbury defended the right to strike in the context of the 1985 SEQEB dispute and when the Uniting Church took issue with his government's denial of self-determination to the Aboriginal inhabitants of Aurukun and Mornington Island, Bjelke-Petersen was affronted. Regarding the last issue, he argued: 'it's only the administration of the reserve [that] government wishes to control — the church would continue with spiritual activities'.

Bjelke-Petersen's refusal to countenance criticism or opposition
provoked one author to argue that Lutheranism permitted Bjelke-Petersen to believe in a version of the seventeenth-century doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings. As an earthly ruler, he acted with divinely given authority and was responsible for his acts to God alone.47 This theme was also pursued by another author who suggested that the spiritual doctrine of Lutheranism enabled Bjelke-Petersen to compartmentalise his life into public and private areas, so that the ownership of shares in companies that had dealings with the government could be construed as a private interest.48 Such a belief, however, is not peculiar to the Lutheran faith. Pietism and fundamentalism also stress the importance of personal morality. ‘Good’ men are recognised by their virtues such as church attendance, regard for family and sobriety; ‘bad’ men by their vices like lack of religion or intemperance.49 A ‘good’ man will not require political checks and balances. His personal virtue is sufficient guarantee. That this was Bjelke-Petersen’s view, whatever its religious foundations, is demonstrated by comments he made at the time of the Comalco share issue. In response to questioning on the propriety of cabinet ministers owning shares in companies with which they had public dealings, Bjelke-Petersen responded: ‘We are men of integrity. We have been put there by the people year after year. The people know us ... The people know and trust me. We fought an election on it.’50 In another interview, Bjelke-Petersen reiterated this position: ‘... the Christian faith and understanding is absolutely a must to get the real true good strong positive leader who knows where he is going on all issues and can be trusted and relied upon.’51 Many of his supporters shared his view. The ‘Fair Go for Joh’ campaign, arranged to oppose a Prayer Vigil conducted by Christian opponents of the Bjelke-Petersen style of government, declared that the Queensland premier ‘was like Jesus, a prophet never recognised in his own time. He is guided by his Christian ethics, so he cannot go wrong’.52

Further support for the view that Bjelke-Petersen may have been influenced in his line of thinking as much by pietist influences as by Luther’s Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms lies in the fact that his opinions were shared by non-Lutheran colleagues and were widespread in a denominationally plural society, where the separation of church and state was constitutionally guaranteed, and where there
was an entrenched belief in the separation of public and private lives.\textsuperscript{53} Industrial relations minister Vince Lester, a Roman Catholic, argued:

The sooner some members of the clergy, and it seems to be minority groups in the major faiths, understand their role is really saving souls, and not running the politics of the country, the better.\textsuperscript{54}

Cabinet colleague and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Ken Tomkins (Church of England) believed that ‘the merging of religious belief with political action is not a wise path’.\textsuperscript{55} On the subject of share ownership, a number of ministers accepted shares at par from Comalco, a company that had business dealings with the government. Leader of the Liberal Party and Treasurer, Sir Gordon Chalk (Methodist), Local Government Minister, Wally Rae (Presbyterian), Police Minister, Max Hodges (Church of England), Conservation Minister, Neville Hewitt (Church of England), and Health Minister, Doug Tooth (Church of England), all took shares. So did senior bureaucrats, a press secretary, Florence Bjelke-Petersen, journalists and Labor Party members. ‘Uproar was relatively muted in Queensland.’\textsuperscript{56} Lutheran and non-Lutheran alike subscribed to a similar ethic.

In any event, Bjelke-Petersen’s desire to separate church and state was selective. As early as 1954, as a backbench Member of Parliament, he was happy to quote Protestant Church support for his opposition to the legalisation of off-course betting,\textsuperscript{57} and, as Premier, he attempted to enlist support from the churches in his opposition to condom vending machines.\textsuperscript{58} In addition, the fundamentalist churches whose allegiance he had were politically interventionist, especially on issues such as education, sexual morality and support for a ‘good’ man such as Bjelke-Petersen. Pastor Clark Taylor of the Mansfield Christian Outreach Centre made no attempt to separate church and state when he stated:

I support any candidate who would stand for godly government, Christian morality in society and Christian education. If Joh supports that, we recommend they support him. We are for those who are for God. The church has to be involved.\textsuperscript{59}

Yet many of the fundamentalist churches appeared relatively unconcerned by financial corruption. Fundamentalist religion tends to
embrace material progress. The American fundamentalist Jim Bakker told his flock: ‘if you pray for a camper, be sure to tell God what colour’.\(^{60}\) His followers were more concerned with issues such as homosexuality, capital punishment, pornography and abortion than they were with political or business corruption. Many Australian fundamentalists demonstrated a similarly schizoid quality. Howard Carter, the Director of the Logos Foundation, a rural religious group that strongly supported the Bjelke-Petersen government, told his followers that the issue in the 1989 state election was not ‘the Fitzgerald Report or the gerrymander. It is values versus permissiveness’.\(^{61}\) There appeared to be an attitude that ‘these corruptions require personal salvation for correction, not “political solutions”’.\(^{62}\) The predominantly individualistic ethic of Protestantism assumed that the relationship between people, their conscience and God was highly personal. Such an approach encouraged the development of a situation where:

Few among the Protestants were moved to espouse a ‘social gospel’ alongside or in place of one concentrating on the individual. And those few who did so gained hardly any support from their fellow religionists, because, quite rightly, the latter detected an in-built challenge to the socio-economic status quo.\(^{63}\)

When Christians emphasised the social dimensions of Christianity rather than personal piety and argued that the Church should act in support of oppressed groups, such as the Aboriginal people on Aurukun and Mornington Island, Bjelke-Petersen was uncomprehending.\(^{64}\) As a Sunday School teacher and lay preacher, Bjelke-Petersen should have been better informed than most parishioners. Although he believed that he had ‘obtained a deep insight into the Christian faith and religion’,\(^{65}\) he appears to be like many other Australian churchgoers, who have only a flimsy understanding of doctrine.\(^{66}\) The transcript of a radio interview with theologian David Millikan indicates that Bjelke-Petersen’s understanding of the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms was as woolly as his understanding of the separation of powers.\(^{67}\) After intensive study one researcher argued that Bjelke-Petersen cannot be described as a classical Lutheran,\(^{68}\) a view supported by a Professor of Protestant Theology at Tubingen
University, who was not prepared to recognise Bjelke-Petersen as a ‘genuine’ Lutheran. 69

That this is so, is understandable because Lutheranism in Queensland was taught by poorly trained pastors and influenced by the pietism that prevailed in all denominations. It appears unlikely, given these circumstances, that Bjelke-Petersen’s view of the state was much affected by Luther’s Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. Even if it had been, its effect would have been to reinforce prevailing cross-denominational views on the separation of church and state. What religion seems to have given Bjelke-Petersen is a view of morality as personal rather than political. In a tract that he wrote when he was a Sunday School teacher, he stated his conviction that doing God’s work meant that ‘in due season he shall reap if he faint not’. 70 He believed that ‘nothing happens to you without God’s permission’. It was only a small step from this to believe that whatever he did had God’s approval. As Premier, he continued to hold such views, demonstrating the fundamentalist’s inclination to see things as either black or white:

I always frame the government on the policy: is it right or is it wrong; is it good or is it bad? I always said running a Government or anything to me is quite simple if you work on the basic principle of … your Christian faith and understanding of it. Then, people used to say to me how do you know if it’s right or wrong, how do you know if it’s good or bad? Well, your whole instinct cries out whether it’s good or bad. 71

When pressed as to whether there were times when he was not sure, he replied, ‘No, no’. 72 On another occasion he made a very similar statement but added a utilitarian gloss to the question of rightness or wrongness by asking, ‘Will it be a benefit or blessing to people, in other words?’ 73 The conviction that he knew the answers to such questions meant that opponents must always be wrong. Les Hoey says his cousin ‘has an inner certainty that he knows the answers to our political and social woes’. 74 As a ‘good’ Christian he expected to be trusted and thus had no need for constitutional checks and balances. His religious beliefs confirmed attitudes shaped by a patriarchal family environment. Education at a rural state school added another reinforcing layer.
Notes
5. ibid. His sister, Agneta, also married late in life. Strong ties to their parents may also have been a factor in the late marriages.
20. There are parallels with the evangelical pietism of the Church of England Sydney Archdiocese and the ‘worldly’ Anglicanism of the established Church of England in the United Kingdom. Colonial manifestations of a mother
church frequently take on a more pietistic approach in the transposition from metropolitan church to colonial derivative.

22. George Marsden quoted in Harrison, op. cit., p. 65.
27. ibid.
28. ibid., p. 52.
29. ibid., p. 111.
34. F. O. Thiele, One Hundred Years of the Lutheran Church in Queensland, United Evangelical Lutheran Church In Australia, Brisbane, 1938, p. 98.
35. M. Bjelke-Petersen, 'Church Life in Early Kingaroy', from a talk presented to the Taabinga Lutheran Ladies Guild, 19 April 1966, p. 6 ff.
40. Martin Luther, 'Secular Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed', in Rupp and Drewery, op. cit., p. 110.

42. Quoted in Brady, op. cit., p. 34.


47. Gillman, op. cit.


52. Muston, op. cit.

53. Section 116 of the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act states that 'The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth'.


55. ibid., p. 383.

56. E. Whitton, op. cit., p. 19.


58. Harrison, op. cit., p. 52.


64. For an examination of this issue, see David Rivers, Aboriginal and Islander Policy as a Focus for Church–State Relations in Queensland, BA (Hons) thesis, University of Queensland, 1992.

65. Muston, op. cit., p. 5.

66. For an account of some of these, see K. S. Inglis, 'Religious Behaviour', in

68. ibid., p. 521.
72. ibid.
73. ‘The Joh Tapes’, op. cit.
CHAPTER 3
EDUCATION AND OCCUPATION

In the Queensland of Bjelke-Petersen's youth, state schools were authoritarian in style and bureaucratic in structure, so the most likely impact of schooling on Bjelke-Petersen would have been to fortify the values he had already acquired at home and in church. Education in Queensland lagged behind that of the other states largely because of the state's decentralised nature. Throughout Australia children in urban areas continued with education for longer than their rural cousins and Queensland was no exception. Education in Queensland lagged behind that of the other states largely because of the state's decentralised nature. Throughout Australia children in urban areas continued with education for longer than their rural cousins and Queensland was no exception. Secondary education was slow to develop in the state because it depended on the development of a middle class in a position to appreciate its benefits. The growth of this class awaited large cities which were comparatively slow to emerge: ‘... so long as much of life in Queensland was based on primary industries, then for so long did further and higher education lack a motivating force.’ As education developed, it was utilitarian in its orientation, with an emphasis on commercial, technical, agricultural and domestic skills. Sir Robert Herbert, the first premier of Queensland, summed up the prevailing view succinctly: ‘There is no necessity in this country for high classical attainments.’ Nor were libraries and art galleries given a high priority:

By 1906 Brisbane Public Library had far fewer books than in the corresponding library in any other capital city except Hobart; there was a National Art Gallery with sixty-two ‘pictures’, and a museum which
attracted many visitors, especially on Sundays. In general, Queensland found its cultural pleasures out-of-doors.\(^5\)

Nineteenth-century attitudes to education carried over into the twentieth century. Queensland was the last state in Australia to raise the compulsory school age from 12 to 14.\(^6\) Education beyond the primary grades was not encouraged for other than a gifted few. A Country Party MP, T. R. Roberts, felt that ‘there was such a thing as too much education’ and that ‘too much money can be spent on secondary education’.\(^7\) Australian Directors of Education ‘were not anxious to foster freedom and variety in their schools’.\(^8\) The aims of primary education were ‘orderliness, discipline and development of skills’,\(^9\) a set of goals entirely consistent with the Bjelke-Petersen family values, and which later underpinned his own government’s approach to education.

Spending on education under Country–Liberal Party governments was the lowest of any state in Australia,\(^10\) but Labor’s priorities had been no different. Labor governments put land settlement, unemployment relief and public hospitals well ahead of education\(^11\) so that by the early 1950s Queensland was ‘the most backward Australian state’ in the field of secondary education.\(^12\) No new high schools were built in Brisbane between 1924 and 1952.\(^13\) Rural areas were even worse off. The Schools Commission reported in the early 1970s that Queensland was the most disadvantaged state with respect to schools outside major urban areas.\(^14\) By the mid-1960s only 26 per cent of Queensland teachers had degrees and only 10 per cent had a degree and a diploma in education.\(^15\)

Although there is some evidence to suggest that Queensland students performed well in basic writing and mathematics compared with pupils in other states,\(^16\) there appeared to be an ongoing fear of developing students’ critical and imaginative faculties. In 1980 Florence Bjelke-Petersen, the Premier’s wife, declared that ‘today they talk an awful lot about humanities. My feeling is that they ought to learn a lot more about practicalities’.\(^17\) Backbenchers and cabinet ministers expressed similarly functional expectations of education. The multi-millionaire former National Party member for Toowoomba South (1986–1991), Clive Berghofer, said in 1994 that
we are getting over-educated and we send our children to school to be turned into geniuses instead of doing an honest day’s work’. The Premier himself, who in 1982 signalled his regard for education by giving the portfolio to one of his most junior ministers, declared that ‘we only allow wholesome, decent, practical material in schools’. Russell Hinze, the Minister for Main Roads, wanted ‘to be sure that expenditure on education represents value for money’. ‘If it isn’t I’ll fight to get it to put down a few more miles of road, where I’ll know it will be value for money spent.’ Even the Deputy-Director of Education in Queensland, Bill Hamilton, treated high academic achievement with suspicion, raising his doubts in an address to high school principals in 1978:

As well as shedding the incompetent we could also do without some of our most academically qualified teachers, who also possess great teaching skill, because of the attitudes and beliefs with which they deliberately or unwittingly infect students: they may be subversive, anti-establishment, anarchistic, revolutionary, permissive, amoral or immoral, irreligious or over-religious. Too many young teachers belong to the counter-culture.

Education’s relatively low priority in Bjelke-Petersen’s government is unsurprising given his own limited education and the educational achievements of Queensland ministers. Their lack of formal education was used by the Queensland Police Union to oppose proposals by Commissioner Whitrod that candidates for promotion should pass a number of subjects in the police arts-science course. The police union Secretary ‘produced survey figures showing that Queensland state cabinet ministers had no better education than the average policeman’. Like Russell Hinze, most of the former had been educated at the ‘University of Life’ rather than in the academy. Bjelke-Petersen claimed to have learnt more from living alone in a cow bail for fifteen years than if he had taken a degree at Oxford. His formal education, however, finished well before university entrance, at Taabinga Village State School, where he says he ‘was about average’ as a student.

By his own account, he was more interested in sport than lessons, ‘a very self-confident, rather cocksure little boy who liked to be first at everything’. He recalls that the discipline of home prepared him
well for school and that he was well behaved. He remembers being caned only once, for talking in class. Both crime and punishment were symptomatic of the prevailing ethos where the only classroom interaction was between superior and subordinate rather than between peers. Until 1957, the Department of Education in Queensland was known as the Department of Public Instruction, a term which has as one of its meanings ‘orders or directions’ and which suggests a hierarchical relationship between teacher and pupil. ‘Drill’ before school, with children in lines on ‘parade’, followed by a ‘march’ into school was usual. Rote learning and preparation for exams characterised the system and answers to questions were either ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. The style of education was very close to that desired half a century later by the fundamentalist groups STOP and CARE who favoured ‘the scriptural method of educating children’. This involved ‘teaching by rote, memorising and learning from the examples of history …’.27 The passive reception of factual material was further encouraged by the domination of the ‘Scholarship’ examination at the end of primary schooling.28 In this environment, teachers presented ‘knowledge’ in such a way as to suggest academic consensus on the topic:

By presenting knowledge as established, available in texts or transmitted by the teacher, schooling implies it is independent of the person, to be accepted and accommodated to, and obscures or even denies that it is of human construction, differentially interpretable and sustained by being accepted and acted upon. Such a conception functions to limit the learner’s sense of power and competence, foster a passiveness and dependence in the student and enhance the probability of an accommodative response to existing social conditions.29

The Queensland syllabus remained much the same from 1905 to 1930.30 Many of the teachers were pupil teachers whose training was minimal and who commenced their teaching careers at 14 years of age. A writer in the February 1912 edition of the Queensland Education Journal quoted with approval the view that as far as teachers were concerned ‘high character comes before competent knowledge’.31 Even a school inspector with some sympathy for progressive methods decided that ultimately ‘there must be a large amount of ram, jam,
It is easy to see how questioning in such an environment was frowned upon and discouraged.

There was no direct attempt at political socialisation through the teaching of government. There was, however, instruction in ‘Civics and Morals’, which was a Bible Study course. As well as Bible lessons there was an emphasis on King, Country, Empire and the symbols of nationality, and a concomitant abhorrence of ‘aliens’. There was particular enthusiasm for the White Australia policy in Queensland and a clear desire to maintain a homogeneous white European population. In 1912 the Queensland Governor expressed himself ‘well satisfied with the training in loyalty’.

The declaration of war against Germany heightened patriotic fervour. In 1915, 5000 costumed state school children took part in a display designed to represent the peoples of the British Empire. An early photograph of Bjelke-Petersen with Christian and Neta shows him dressed in neat white shirt and sporting a Union Jack tie, and Christian wearing an imitation Light Horse slouch hat and feathers. Possibly, his Scandinavian-born parents were keen to demonstrate their family’s patriotism, although enthusiasm for the head of state is common among young children. With Bjelke-Petersen, however, his affection and admiration lasted for a lifetime. A photograph of the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh hang next to an illustration of Jesus in the dining room at ‘Bethany’. He did not feel, as many Australians of non-British origin do, that the British royal family was irrelevant. Rather, as an outsider he maintained a loyalty so intense that it suggests a desire to compensate for his foreign ancestry. Conformity to tradition is common among second- or third-generation immigrants like Bjelke-Petersen who are desirous of fitting in:

The nonconformity of others appears to such persons as a frivolous challenge to the whole order of things they are trying so hard to become part of. Naturally it is resented, and the demand for conformity in public becomes at once an expression of such resentment and a means of displaying one’s own soundness. This habit has a tendency to spread from politics into intellectual and social spheres, where it can be made to challenge almost anyone whose pattern of life is different and who is imagined to enjoy a superior social position ...
In addition to immigrant status, Bjelke-Petersen’s childhood left him with another difficulty to overcome. At nine years of age he contracted polio and was unable to attend school for a year. He eventually recovered, not through the assistance of orthodox medicine but, he believed, by the massage treatment favoured by Sister Elizabeth Kenny. He was left with a slight limp, and he never caught up on the missed schoolwork, and never regained his pre-eminent position in the sports field and school ground. Bjelke-Petersen himself minimises the impact of polio and portrays it as a salutary and humbling experience. It is possible, however, that his self-image was severely affected by paralysis and its aftermath. His later zeal for both work and politics may reflect a desire to recover from the blow to his self-esteem which polio caused, and to seek approval from a wide audience. Some of Bjelke-Petersen’s aggressive political drive may have its origins in both his childhood polio and his immigrant status.

The combination of poor health and lack of interest meant that he failed the Scholarship examination which marked entry to high school, and, rather than repeat the year, he returned to Bethany to work full time. The family was poor and it was not unusual for children to leave school at fourteen, especially in the country where experience was often regarded more highly than learning and where boys, especially, were less likely to continue their education than their city counterparts. Because of his father’s ill health, Bjelke-Petersen was fully responsible for the day-to-day running of the farm. Like most farmers he derived a high level of satisfaction from his occupation and way of life, despite the hardships and long hours of work. Much of the time was spent alone, living on other family properties. As a farmer, however, he would always be a price taker, at the mercy of markets, climate and middlemen. His ambition to put poverty behind him pushed him in an entrepreneurial direction. He added contract ploughing and threshing to his workload, and by the 1930s the Bjelke-Petersens were a prosperous family.

When war broke out in 1939 Bjelke-Petersen failed to volunteer, a decision that was later held against him. He reasoned that he would probably have been rejected on account of his childhood polio, ‘but before the question even arose I was rejected on the grounds that the work I did in the rural industry was essential to the war effort’.
Many farmers in similar circumstances, however, volunteered. Most did not have as an additional motivation the history of hostility between Denmark and Germany, and the German occupation of their ancestral homeland. The decision not to volunteer sits oddly with Bjelke-Petersen’s patriotism and enthusiasm for the Crown, but undoubtedly the burgeoning family business would have suffered if Bjelke-Petersen had joined up. The drive to prosper was strong.

The war effort, however, had its impact. Bjelke-Petersen had seen army bulldozers in operation and decided that these were the perfect machines for clearing scrub. In business he was an innovative problem solver, with the purchase of these bulldozers and learning to fly being prime examples. If he resented being told what to do, he was always willing to listen to advice on how to achieve his goals. Allen Callaghan recalls that he took these skills with him into political life: ‘Joh had one attribute: he knew how to pick good staff and if he had a problem he would get somebody to solve it for him …’

As a contractor, he was a zealous ‘developer’ of Queensland’s brigalow country, pulling more than 100,000 acres of scrub, and delighting over the mastery of nature which these exploits demonstrated:

We were clearing as many as 100 acres a day. Today you would see a huge area covered with brigalows so thick that you could hardly walk through it, and tomorrow you would not see a tree standing upright … Anyone who has been there when brigalow scrub is being pulled by two big dozers is unlikely to forget the sound of it. On a clear day you can hear the cracking and the snapping of the trees from a mile away. It gives me a lot of satisfaction today to know that the land we cleared in those days is now producing great wealth for the state and the nation.

Bjelke-Petersen never lost his enthusiasm for development that became, as it had for previous Queensland premiers, the unquestioned, dominant policy goal of his government. His embrace of development, progress and entrepreneurship was widely shared and supported. Even when some Queenslanders began to question the inevitability of development, he continued to retain his passion for projects such as the establishment of a resort on a section of national park on Lindeman Island, the construction of the world’s tallest
building in Brisbane, and the mining of bauxite at Aurukun reserve, despite the objections of the local Aboriginal people and the Uniting Church. It may also explain his weakness for entrepreneurs such as Stephen Horvath, who claimed to have invented a hydrogen-powered car, and the fraudulent cancer therapist, Milan Brych. Allen Callaghan traced their attraction for Bjelke-Petersen to his reverence for successful people, his love of inventions and his belief that their schemes might work. He would greet each dubious proposal with the optimistic words, ‘Oh, he might have an idea ... he might have an idea.’

Although Bjelke-Petersen’s formal schooling ended at fourteen, his education continued. He enrolled in correspondence school under the tutelage of his sister, Agneta, and, more importantly for his future as a politician, he joined the local Kingaroy debating society. Here he learned to speak in public and think on his feet. His sister wrote in her diary that the adjudicator of one debate, rather surprisingly, ‘highly complimented Joh for his flow of beautiful English’.47 As Premier he spoke of the debt he owed his sister for teaching him to debate, although his first media adviser, Hugh Bingham, reported that ‘Joh’s sense of debating was not what the ordinary person’s sense of debating was. It was a series of assertions.’48

Bjelke-Petersen taught Sunday School and delivered sermons regularly in churches at Murgon, Kingaroy, Home Creek and Yarraman, commencing with a sermon at Home Creek in 1938 on the topic of swearing and ill-natured words.49 The local pastor wrote that he was convinced ‘that with a little training you can become an excellent speaker’.50 Between 1939 and 1940, influenced by Agneta who had taken some Workers Education Association courses on a visit to Brisbane, he undertook a University of Queensland extension course on the ‘Art of Writing’.51 Among the examiner’s comments on the embryonic Bjelke-Petersen style were some demonstrating a remarkable prescience. On ‘Camping Out’ the examiner commented: ‘In this style your wordiness is of course permissible. The chatty style, however, has its drawbacks. It is apt to become trivial and long-winded.’ On ‘Getting Up Early’ the marker noted, ‘... there is a certain dogmatic harshness about your style.’52 In addition to these literary efforts, Bjelke-Petersen gave talks on the local radio station with such
apparent success that he was tempted to apply for an announcer's job. With the assistance of his sister and father he had reached a modest proficiency in verbal communication. As Premier, however, he was famed for his incoherence, which these early successes suggest may have been exaggerated in order to enhance his simple 'man of the people' style.

By the time Bjelke-Petersen was thirty, he was a prosperous farmer and businessman with moderate levels of skill and experience in public speaking. The political marks which had been left on his character by family, religion, schooling and occupation were mutually reinforcing and ensured a good fit between him, the farming region in which he grew up and the wider state arena. From his family he had inherited his political allegiance, personal piety, courtesy, capacity for hard work, pragmatism, anti-intellectualism, and recognition of patriarchal authority. Religion was inextricably bound up with family influences. Antipodean Lutheranism taught piety, the value of hard work and an individualistic, rather than a social, morality. He was left with the strong belief that as a good Christian he must be right, and this influenced him to treat allegations of impropriety and opposition to his government with contempt. School reinforced the values acquired at home and at church. Diligence, obedience and respect for authority were encouraged. Students were rarely stimulated to pursue knowledge for its own sake, so that when he became a farmer and entrepreneur it was easy to value practical experience above book learning. He was highly motivated to achieve success in order to escape his family's early poverty. A desire to compensate for the damage polio had done to his self-image, and to make up for his status as an outsider of Danish extraction, may have been additional spurs. Once embarked upon a political career, he was tenacious and ambitious, making the most of every opportunity and refusing to give ground, no matter what the opposition.

Notes
4. ibid., p. 27.
5. ibid., p. 21.
12. ibid., p. 337.
13. Charlton, op. cit., p. 139.
26. Bjelke-Petersen, op. cit., p. 15. According to Bjelke-Petersen, this changed after
he contracted polio which 'brought me down to earth and made me humble', p. 17.
32. Quoted in Hazlehurst, op. cit., p. 16.
33. Hazlehurst, op. cit., p. 16.
34. Examples of the racist desire to segregate Europeans from Aborigines, Japanese and Chinese can be found in the Queensland Education Journal, 18 July 1922, p. 9, and 19 February, 1923, pp. 37–38.
37. Bjelke-Petersen, op. cit., unnumbered page.
43. Ibid., p. 347.
44. Bjelke-Petersen, op. cit., p. 33.
45. 'Grazier, Scrub Puller To Top', Courier-Mail, 8 August 1968.
49. Townsend, op. cit., p. 175.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid., p. 176.
52. Ibid., p. 178.
CHAPTER 4

THE POLITICIAN

FOR a professional politician, the socialisation associated with political activity is extremely important. Political institutions continue the shaping process that commenced in childhood, modifying both external conduct and inner life. In the case of Bjelke-Petersen, the political milieu and institutions of Queensland were generally supportive of his values and important aspects of his political style. Many of his early beliefs remained intact because, in the environment in which he worked, they were challenged so infrequently. Nevertheless, there was much to learn from both experience and other people in the time from his election to the Kingaroy Shire Council in 1946 and his assumption of the premiership in 1968. This period can usefully be seen as Bjelke-Petersen’s ‘first career’ in politics, during which he achieved and secured power. His ‘second career’ spanned the premiership and his exercise of power. The ‘first career’ is often characterised by deference, because on the way up ‘one cannot be too humble, too serving, too responsive to the wishes of others’. Once the goal of leadership is reached, however, ‘controls give way and hubris takes over’. This was the pattern of Bjelke-Petersen’s career, but in his early years in politics he sometimes had to choose between deferring to the electorate and deferring to the party leader. In addition, there were tensions between the aspiring politician’s need to be deferential and the typical political personality’s own demands for deference. In Bjelke-Petersen’s case, the suppression of signs of ambition was not totally successful. Sometimes a grandiose vision of himself emerged.

The young Bjelke-Petersen ‘was a hard-working, serious, friendly’
chap with no overt signs of ambition. Bjelke-Petersen denies striving for political success, with claims such as ‘I didn’t want to go in [to parliament] because I was making so much money in contracting’ and ‘there wasn’t any material gain for me in becoming a parliamentarian. I only look upon myself as a servant of the people’. Such comments need to be treated with caution. Most politicians promote the fiction that they are motivated by the ideal of public service rather than private ambition. For a populist leader, the notion of being drafted is more flattering than the suggestion that his political career was the result of calculating ambition, yet Bjelke-Petersen was well aware of the connection between success and careful planning. An examination of his unfolding career suggests that his political ascent was not as serendipitous as he makes out, and that he has persistently expunged any failure from his recorded memory.

The proposition that calculation played a part in Bjelke-Petersen’s political career does not contradict the conclusion of the previous chapter that possible motives for his ambition lie in the experiences of his childhood and youth. Many protagonists, although not aware themselves of underlying motives, still employ rational calculations in striving to attain desired goals. Bjelke-Petersen himself stressed the importance of ‘forward thinking, forward planning … You’ve got to be miles ahead of anybody else’. Other evidence also suggests that, like many ambitious people, Bjelke-Petersen began to prepare for future positions before actually filling them. As a young man he polished his debating and communications skills and developed a wide network through his contracting business. As a shire councillor he simultaneously developed a profile in the Country Party. As a backbencher he flew around the state on behalf of the Premier and came to public notice by rejecting parliamentary salary increases and opposing party policy on road transport and leasehold land. As Works and Housing Minister he strategically used his portfolio to build a sense of indebtedness among his parliamentary colleagues.

This does not mean that Bjelke-Petersen anticipated becoming premier, especially as, when he entered politics, the Labor Party appeared to be entrenched in power. Politics is too unpredictable for an aspiring politician to map out an undeviating route, but Bjelke-Petersen appeared to have a general objective of enhancing his power
and status.\textsuperscript{15} When opportunities created by the changing circumstances and chances of political life came, he seized them. Chance intervened most dramatically in his career in the spectacular downfall of the Gair government, which took the Country Party from near permanent opposition to government, and in the untimely death of Jack Pizzey, which permitted Bjelke-Petersen to assume the premiership at age 57.

As the individual continues to invest time and energy in political office, so the alternatives begin to appear less appealing and rewarding: ‘In a sense, the individual’s investments tend to pull him further and further into the sequence even though he may not have originally intended to follow the route on which he now finds himself.’\textsuperscript{16} In Bjelke-Petersen’s words, politics ‘just sort of, it gets in your blood a little bit, like alcohol I suppose’.\textsuperscript{17} He took the first steps towards political addiction at the modest level of shire councillor. He had, however, two years earlier contested a Country Party plebiscite for the seat of Nanango against the sitting member, J. B. Edwards, who received 325 primary votes to 275 for Bjelke-Petersen. It is difficult to find accounts of this loss in published versions of his career because he has consistently expunged or rewritten defeat and failure, but a 1976 edition of \textit{Canberra Survey} notes that Bjelke-Petersen ‘won Country Party endorsement in the State seat of Nanango (now Barambah) at his second attempt’.\textsuperscript{18} The fact that he had tried and failed before eventually achieving success indicates keenness to become a parliamentarian rather than the reluctance which he has always feigned. He was not alone in this. Gordon Chalk was another politician who presented himself as a reluctant candidate. Chalk’s biographer describes the process:

Declaring oneself as a would-be politician is making a claim to the possession of special qualities of value to the community. Custom and ritual require that ideally such a person’s aptitude and promise should be recognised initially by others. The modest man must be seen to have the necessary abilities, should be willing to respond to a call to serve, but ought not to appear too eager to assume the mantle of leadership.\textsuperscript{19}

Bjelke-Petersen’s own account is consistent with this pattern, but at odds with the reality of his unsuccessful first venture:
while I was in Kingaroy buying some equipment for my bulldozers, I ran into our local federal member, Charlie Adermann... He said to me, 'Joh, as you know, Jim Edwards is pretty old and he's talking about getting out. If he does get out, you ought to stand.' Jim Edwards, a Country Party man, had been our state member for the past twenty-eight years, and soon after my conversation with Charlie Adermann he announced he was stepping down. Until the moment Charlie spoke to me that day, I am sure the idea of standing for Parliament had not once entered my head.20

After his failure to win preselection, Bjelke-Petersen turned to local government, a popular and advantageous starting point for political aspirants, especially for Country/National Party members.21 Many continued as councillors or shire chairmen long after they had entered state politics, a practice which ceased only after the Goss government introduced legislation in 1991 to prohibit the simultaneous holding of parliamentary and local government office. Bjelke-Petersen's mentor, Sir Charles Adermann, remained chairman of the Kingaroy Shire Council after entering federal parliament. In this context, Bjelke-Petersen was unusual in that his local government apprenticeship was so short. A year after his election to Council, he won the state seat of Nanango for the Country Party and, on completing his three-year term, did not stand again for Council.

As a new councillor, Bjelke-Petersen appeared relatively unobtrusive. The Council minutes covering his three-year term show that his activities in the chamber were largely confined to attending meetings and seconding the occasional motion. He was appointed to two committees, the General Purposes Committee and the School of Arts Committee.22 He was also elected as the Council's representative on the Wide Bay Burnett Regional Electricity Board. In addition and more significantly, he built his profile in the Country Party, giving radio talks and becoming secretary of the local branch of the Party, a task in which he was aided by his sister, Neta. One of the secretary's tasks was to send receipts for membership subscriptions to Country Party members. Neta recalls that she 'always had to sign Joh's name, so that was yet another way he became gradually known by the people'.23 Such a strategy suggests a candidate preparing the ground for a parliamentary career.
The thoroughness with which he approached contesting the 1946 plebiscite to select the Country Party candidate for Nanango also indicates keenness despite protestations to the contrary. Neta Bjelke-Petersen presents the family version of initial reluctance, but acknowledges her brother’s efforts: ‘Although Joh must have been the most reluctant starter ever known to stand for Parliament, he nevertheless did in fact visit a very large proportion of voters.’ Apart from Bjelke-Petersen, there were three other candidates, including P. B. Edwards, the son of the previous member. Bjelke-Petersen won by a comfortable margin but Edwards’ supporters raised the issue of Bjelke-Petersen’s war service and made unsubstantiated allegations that plebiscites were not always honestly run. After the intervention of the Party’s leader, Frank Nicklin, Edwards was expelled from the party for standing against an endorsed candidate. P. B. Edward’s bitterness at his defeat was evident during the campaign when he accused Bjelke-Petersen of branch stacking and campaigning against his father, the previous incumbent. Edwards attacked Bjelke-Petersen in the _Kingaroy Herald:_

He was successful in including many members in the organisation, not because they were, or ever had been Country Party supporters, but because they would be Bjelke-Petersen supporters ... the great majority of solid Country Party members were unaware that during the past six years continued efforts had been made to dislodge Mr. J. B. Edwards.

In his election campaign, Bjelke-Petersen pursued themes which would also become familiar: state development, the connection between the Labor Party and communism and the virtues of individual initiative. He campaigned throughout the electorate, supported by advertisements in the _Kingaroy Herald_ and election talks on the radio. There were four other candidates. Bjelke-Petersen won easily, but the vigorously contested plebiscite combined with his failure in 1944 suggest that his entry into state politics came about not through anointment but through a hard-fought battle which he strongly desired to win.

Bjelke-Petersen recalls that when he entered parliament, aged 36, he felt ‘like a stranger in a strange land’ where the ability to work hard physically was replaced by the politician’s tool of trade, the ability to
talk. Sir Robert Sparkes remembers that his father, who served concurrently with Bjelke-Petersen, befriended the raw recruit and ‘took his part on a number of occasions’. Sparkes goes on to say that ‘Joh was ... like a new boy at boarding school. He was subject to a lot of teasing and criticism and personal attacks and that sort of thing’. He remained, however, undaunted and sufficiently young and enthusiastic to expect advancement, but immediate progress for Bjelke-Petersen and other Country Party members was blocked by the Hanlon government’s strong hold on power.

The Labor Party had held continuous office in Queensland from 1915, excluding the three-year term of the Moore government from 1929 to 1932. Politics in Queensland during the long years of Labor rule came to be typified by a preoccupation with material progress and development, as well as by ‘gerrymanders, authoritarianism, anti-intellectualism, the use of office for private gain, a tendency to flamboyant rhetoric and anti-communism’. Premiers like Theodore, McCormack, Forgan Smith, Hanlon and Gair were tough politicians and autocratic leaders. The premier’s power was further enhanced by the abolition of the Legislative Council in 1922 which meant that premiers had to concern themselves with control only of the Lower House. So long as leaders were electorally successful, they were able to dominate their parliamentary colleagues, and through control of them, the parliament. Although Bjelke-Petersen was strongly opposed to Labor governments, their vision for Queensland, their policy priorities and their premiers’ collective personal style provided a model to which he was personally well suited and to which he later conformed.

Ned Hanlon came from an Irish Catholic background and was opposed to Bjelke-Petersen’s side of politics, but there were some superficial parallels in the early experiences of the two men. Hanlon’s family had farmed for a number of years at Barrambah Creek near Gayndah in the South Burnett before being forced off the land by drought. Hanlon too left school at fourteen in order to begin earning a living, but it was in his personal style and political priorities that the resemblance between the two men is most pronounced. In observing Hanlon, Bjelke-Petersen, as a new backbencher, must have learned what was expected of, and accepted from, a premier of
Queensland. Hanlon was an autocrat who controlled the Parliamentary Labor Party absolutely. An astute politician who disliked criticism, he overreacted with a loss of temper if people disagreed with him. According to Sir Thomas Hiley, leader of the Liberal Party from 1949 to 1954 and Queensland's Treasurer from 1957 to 1965, 'there was no independence in the Hanlon cabinet'. Hanlon was a vigorous defender of Queensland against 'the vested interests of the south', a strong opponent of communism, and, like his predecessors, continued to emphasise primary production and decentralisation to the neglect of manufacturing. Like Bjelke-Petersen as premier, he was not averse to confrontation. He declared a state of emergency in response to a lengthy strike by meatworkers who had been joined in support by miners and waterside workers. When two railway unions also threatened to join the strike, he proclaimed, under the State Transportation Act, a state of emergency and in provocative language linked the strikers with the Communist Party by describing them as 'mimicking Molotov' and 'budding commissars from the south'. When the state of emergency failed to produce the desired effect, even more draconian legislation was rushed through parliament. The Industrial Law Amendment Act gave police extensive powers to arrest without warrant, prohibit picketing, enter union offices or meetings and use force whenever they considered it necessary. Under the aegis of this legislation, the police broke up a peaceful protest with such violence that three people, including the Communist MP Fred Paterson who was an observer on the footpath, were hospitalised.

Hanlon's rural orientation permitted him to rationalise bringing in to parliament the 1949 Electoral Districts Bill which introduced the zonal system to Queensland to Labor's electoral advantage. On the old boundaries, Labor almost certainly would have been defeated. This was not the only act of political expediency to impact on Queensland over the next forty years. Hanlon's premiership was marked by scandal and accusations of corruption in much the same way that Bjelke-Petersen's came to be.

On his death in 1952 Hanlon was succeeded as premier by Vince Gair who continued in his predecessor's vein. Gair, who had also failed to complete secondary school, was openly hostile to academics, dominated his cabinet, was politically conservative, and was intolerant,
arrogant and dictatorial. For the second time since entering parliament, Bjelke-Petersen was presented with an authoritarian model in the person of the premier.

After the fall of the Gair government, the first Nicklin Ministry was sworn in on 12 August 1957. Nicklin had a reputation for courtesy, geniality and probity. Although he endeavoured to set high standards for his ministry and his own reputation remained unsullied, there are numerous examples of financial conflict of interest among members of Nicklin's cabinet. There were also complaints of police corruption. Former Deputy Premier and Treasurer Sir Thomas Hiley claimed that he had confronted Nicklin and his police minister Alex Dewar about Police Commissioner Frank Bischoff's corruption. The Opposition made numerous complaints that senior police, including Bischoff, campaigned on behalf of the Coalition in country areas.

The 1964 Gibbs Royal Commission into the alleged involvement of senior police in prostitution at Brisbane's National Hotel led to no prosecutions but raised questions which were still being asked at the Fitzgerald inquiry.

Although Nicklin appeared to break from the autocratic mould in which Queensland premiers had previously been cast, there are hints that he was tougher than his public image suggested and that he was 'an effective politician who could display an iron fist in private'. Bjelke-Petersen himself seems to concur with this opinion when he writes of living in dread of Frank Nicklin. Occasionally Nicklin's iron fist was displayed in public. In actions reminiscent of Hanlon, he resorted to the proclamation of a state of emergency to deal with industrial strife at Mount Isa Mines in 1961 and in 1964. When industrial trouble resurfaced and the miners struck, Nicklin issued an Order in Council which seriously curtailed civil liberties. The last year of Nicklin's premiership saw major demonstrations on the issue of civil liberties in Queensland, where it was necessary to obtain permits for demonstrations from the District Superintendent of Traffic and pay $1 per placard carried. No provisions were made for appeals in the event of an unsuccessful application. State cabinet, guided by Nicklin, chose to treat the demonstrators 'with a combination of frivolity and the big stick'. Public support was limited and
the local press warned the university, home to many of the protesters, 'that the public were finding civil liberties a bore'.

Bjelke-Petersen acknowledges that he did not enjoy being a backbencher. He had never worked for a boss and was uncomfortable with his relative powerlessness. For many parliamentarians, being a backbencher is a frustrating experience, especially in opposition where members are largely confined to responding to government initiatives. In Queensland, this was exacerbated by the tradition of 'strong' premiers which effectively curtailed the roles of subordinates, cabinet ministers and backbenchers alike.

Committees, apart from domestic committees associated with matters such as the library and refreshment rooms, did not exist until 1974. Facilities for opposition members were poor. Country members shared bedrooms at the Lodge in Parliament House grounds, with no privacy, no telephone and no desk. And in the cramped facilities, Members shared a small office. The role of most members of parliament was confined to local pork barrel and representative functions.

Many, like Bjelke-Petersen, continued with their business activities, unperturbed by any possibilities of conflict of interest. Gordon Chalk, for example, who was also elected to the Queensland Parliament in 1947, continued with his work at the Toowoomba Foundry, where one of the proprietors, A. A. Griffiths:

> could see real advantages in having an M.P. in the state capital committed to furthering the interests of the company at a time when the ability to conduct business successfully depended in large measure on decisions undertaken by public servants.

When a number of Chalk's constituents became annoyed over the preferential treatment he was obtaining for the Foundry, he resigned and bought a partnership in a property agency. His biographer notes that 'one sure way of capitalising on superior local information [obtained in the course of constituency work] was to operate as an agent in the property market'. It is clear that Chalk changed jobs for expedient rather than ethical reasons and that his activities in real estate raised for him no moral dilemmas. Such was to be the case with Bjelke-Petersen.

Much of Bjelke-Petersen's constituency work was undertaken on
his behalf by Florence, who, like his mother and sister before her, ably supported him. Hugh Bingham, media adviser to Bjelke-Petersen in the early years of the premiership, always suspected that Florence ‘was the brains behind Joh because she had a very acute mind, very unacute way of expressing it but a very instinctive mind’. By taking over much of his electorate work, she freed him for his business ventures and, after the fall of the Gair government, for strategically more important and visible tasks such as flying around the state on jobs for the Premier. She attended many local functions on his behalf and dealt with local problems, as well as taking full responsibility for the family finances and raising their four children. After his forced retirement, Bjelke-Petersen acknowledged that it was not easy to be a good MP and a good husband and father.

As a backbencher Bjelke-Petersen spoke regularly in parliament, although Charles Russell recalls that Bjelke-Petersen was a problem for the party whip ‘because he didn’t like public speaking and very soon got tired of the performances in the house’. Although Bjelke-Petersen had considerable public-speaking experience at a local level, he was not adept in parliament. Twenty years later he still depended on notes and without them was ‘pretty ordinary, stammering ... certainly not in the league of Camm or Chalk as a performer’. Bill Hewitt, a minister in the last coalition government before its collapse in 1983, feels that Bjelke-Petersen’s unworldliness also contributed to his poor performances. Hewitt notes that Bjelke-Petersen was uncomfortable at the theatre and could not relate to popular sports such as cricket. Thus he was deprived of a staple of Australian public speaking: the sporting metaphor. He made up for lack of skill with stamina. Well into his premiership he could be on the floor of Parliament in the early hours of the morning, exhausted, his limp pronounced, and yet appear fresh faced the next morning at an 8.30 joint party meeting. But in the early days, there was little incentive for him to improve. His party was in opposition with few prospects of becoming the government and he had other priorities: ‘Joh was always in the party room working hard for his electorate and his own business.’

An analysis of his speeches shows both the issues that interested him and salient aspects of his personality. There is a remarkable degree
of consistency in the traits and attitudes revealed throughout his long political career, suggesting not only a rigid personality but a conservative parliamentary and political culture in which new ideas were either scarce or unwelcome, or both. The speeches can be taken as a genuine measure of his concerns because, prior to 1975, parliamentary speeches were not subject to party discipline and strategy. ‘Members were free to choose their topic areas, decide the frequency or otherwise and to make their own speaking arrangements’.\(^{58}\) Typically speeches rambled over a number of points and were unconnected to previous speeches and arguments, but despite the discursive style, some persistent topics emerge in Bjelke-Petersen’s speeches.

As well as the expected constituency issues, he discussed the importance of rural production, state development and progress, the necessity of hard work, the evils of gambling and the perils of communism, and made occasional statements in support of alternative medicine and its practitioners. He retained his opinions on most of these issues throughout his life, although public diatribes against gambling ceased when his government permitted legal casinos in Queensland and introduced lotto, bingo, pools, poker machines in clubs, punchcards and night dogs and trots during the 1970s and 1980s.\(^{59}\) The interjections of opposition members during his speeches demonstrate that the extent and scope of his business interests were widely known, a state of affairs aided and abetted by Bjelke-Petersen’s own repeated references to his business dealings. Although his colleagues appeared to feel some unease with that ‘combination of ruthless entrepreneurship and religious fundamentalism’,\(^{60}\) conflict of financial interest on the part of both members of parliament and ministers was clearly accepted.

In his maiden speech, which dealt primarily with the need to foster initiative and enterprise, Bjelke-Petersen spelled out his views on the role of the state. He argued that, in order for a rapid rate of progress to be achieved, state investment may be required in support of private enterprise: ‘... State policy must create and give opportunity to capital to play its part in providing the necessities and comforts that the people need and seek to enjoy.’\(^ {61}\) In the same session he introduced other favourite themes: the negative influence on production of the
forty-hour week, the depressing impact which railway freight policy had on the development of primary and secondary industry and the negative effect on the community of that section which owes allegiance to a foreign power.

During his six years on the opposition backbench he returned to these themes again and again and deviated little from them over his long political career. For example, the attitudes towards unions which he so fulsomely displayed during the SEQEB workers’ strike had already solidified during his early years as a backbencher. He was clearly influenced by the perception that primary producers bore the cost of strikes while being unable to take such action themselves. He expressed concern at ‘the tremendous power that unions exercise in all walks of life and in our economy’ and anticipated the day when ‘union leaders will prove to be not only the working man’s biggest enemies but the biggest enemies of the people of the state’. Often his favourite themes were linked, as when he argued that socialism, the 40-hour week, long service leave and gambling all appealed to the same undesirable trait, the desire to get something for nothing. Similarly, he suggested that socialism was detrimental to development, the shorter working week increased freight costs and restrictionist policies regarding motor transport were an impediment to ‘the urgent need to develop this vast State’.

Other speeches highlighted the pietist strand in his background. This was evident in his advocacy of temperance, his opposition to the legalisation of SP bookmaking and his abhorrence of the use of profits from the Golden Casket lottery to help fund Queensland’s free public hospital system. It also coloured his feeling that the state government should attempt to persuade the federal authorities to make money available for equipment and material rather than ‘for the importation of trashy literature and films’. In his mind, gambling was linked with ‘the less work and more pay’ mentality which had introduced the shorter working week. He was especially offended by ‘that monster in our midst’, the Golden Casket, because it encouraged the inclination to get something for nothing. He also chastised ALP branches for sinking ‘to a low ebb morally’ by resorting to chocolate wheels with cash prizes in order to raise funds.

Bjelke-Petersen was not only concerned with moral wellbeing, In
a lengthy Address in Reply speech he stressed the importance of nutrition and 'a good wholesome balanced diet' and advocated the establishment of 'a course in dietetics at the University'. He quoted at some length the ideas of a Dr Boyd, an enthusiast about the properties of soya beans, rice and fresh wheat germ, who 'thought a balanced diet was one of which 75 per cent of the foodstuffs gave an alkaline ash as opposed to one that gave only a 25 per cent alkaline ash'. In the following year's Supply debate, Bjelke-Petersen once again extolled the benefit of a balanced and wholesome diet and expressed concern that many people lived on a diet of white bread, jam and salt meat. In another address he endorsed the registration of naturopaths and suggested that university courses in naturopathy be established. Advocacy of natural, unprocessed food and alternative health methods is commonplace now, but in the early 1950s such ideas must have seemed rather cranky. Bjelke-Petersen's susceptibility to the methods of alternative practitioners was clearly manifest before his meeting with cancer therapist Milan Brych. Its origins probably lay in the success of alternative methods in curing his own childhood polio.

Another theme of his early parliamentary speeches was the expedient nature of Labor politics, especially the Hanlon government's introduction of electoral zones. Bjelke-Petersen referred to the Labor practice of 'saying if they were not elected people in those areas would not receive fair consideration' and expressed an opinion that critics of his own electoral legislation would one day echo:

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.

Although Bjelke-Petersen expressed outrage at Labor's tactics, he also saw what was possible and what could be got away with. During his own premiership, he implied to the electors of Mount Isa that a successful Labor candidate would be denied the right to make representation to the state government and one of his ministers, Ken Tomkins, implied to the electors of Redcliffe that their proposed rail
link to Brisbane was conditional on a National Party win in the seat. In 1985 Bjelke-Petersen oversaw the final refinement of the zonal system to the advantage of the Nationals.

Bjelke-Petersen did not, however, come to public notice because of these speeches. He first achieved prominence as a Member of Parliament when he refused to accept increases in salary in 1948, 1950 and 1953. He argued that, although parliamentarians were worth the extra money and that high salaries were required to attract the ablest men, he could not accept the money without going before his electors. He reminded his colleagues that they were the servants of the people and increased emoluments must be justified before them. He also linked the rising costs that were used to defend the salary increases with the ‘steeply rising costs’ associated with the introduction of the 40-hour week. Instead of taking the increase personally, he used the money to improve the local showgrounds and schools. As a wealthy man, he had no need of the extra salary, and as a member of parliament representing a safe Country Party seat, he had little to fear in going before the electors. The gestures may well have been a shrewd attempt at publicity with the ultimate aim of fulfilling his own career ambitions. Premier Hanlon took the view that Bjelke-Petersen’s stand was ‘political advertising’. Certainly Bjelke-Petersen was aware of popular opposition to salary increases for parliamentarians.

Bjelke-Petersen also decided against joining the parliamentary superannuation scheme, and, as with his decision not to take a salary increase, his reasons were couched in altruistic terms. He argued that ‘the whole thing savours too much of feathering one’s own nest, placing self-interest first’, and, in a rather grandiose linkage of his private position with global concerns, he said that such a measure was paving the way for communism by undermining public confidence in democratic government. On a more pragmatic level, he acknowledged that one of the benefits of superannuation might be to remove the necessity of looking after defeated members by appointing them to ‘lucrative positions, usually overseas’, which was ‘a most brazen and despicable position’. Despite this insight, the practice of appointing retired or defeated superannuated members to lucrative positions continued during Bjelke-Petersen’s premiership.
For example, after the seat of Bowen disappeared, Peter Delamothe accepted the job of Agent-General for Queensland in London, as did Wally Rae. Ron Camm was appointed to the Chair of the Queensland Sugar Board, former MLA for Wynnum Bill Lamond was made Chairman of the Queensland Small Business Corporation, former MLA for Moorilyan, Vicki Kippin was given a departmental liaison job, Bob Moore, former state Liberal member for Windsor who switched to the Nationals, was appointed a liaison officer with the Department of Survey and Valuation, former treasurer Sir Llew Edwards was made part-time chair of the Expo Authority and former minister Max Hodges was appointed chairman of the Brisbane Port Authority. Years later, former Cabinet colleague Vic Sullivan put a more self-interested construction on Bjelke-Petersen's reluctance to be in the superannuation scheme:

... the story is, by the fellows who were there at the time — the reason he didn't go into the superannuation scheme was because he wanted the money each week himself. He didn't want anyone else doing anything with his money. Then as time went on, he could see the benefits ... and you know he made overtures to get into it somehow or other ...

Sullivan's view cannot be corroborated and certainly differs from Bjelke-Petersen's own recollection that he twice had the opportunity to join the fund:

Both Labor and our side have said to me I'll let you put a little amendment in, put in your money and you get in and get a million or more out of it.

I'm a man of principle, I can't do it. Twice that was offered me, just a little amendment, put it through the House and nobody will even notice and they wouldn't debate it. But I have said no, I won't do that on principle.

Although Bjelke-Petersen missed out on superannuation, one observer calculated that the package he negotiated prior to his resignation as premier was worth $150,000 a year.

Throughout the series of debates on salary increases, his parliamentary colleagues drew attention to the Honourable Member for Barambah's prosperity and hinted that there were inconsistencies between his piety and his business ventures, which they said were
interfering with his capacity to devote his full-time attention to parliament. The interjections came from the Labor opposition and from Tom Aikens, who had split from the Labor Party and been elected under the standard of the Hermit Park Labor Party. Aikens had once remarked ‘... give me one fact and upon it I will build an edifice of assumptions’, so some of his accusations may be unreliable. Nevertheless, the biographies of Peter Delamothe and Gordon Chalk, and an interview with Vic Sullivan, suggest that concerns about Bjelke-Petersen’s business interests were not confined to the Opposition alone. Indeed Chalk records that Bjelke-Petersen had been ‘carpeted’ by Frank Nicklin and told that ‘being an M.P. is a full-time job’.

Labor Minister Bill Power echoed Nicklin’s opinion by referring to Bjelke-Petersen as a ‘part-time member’ and Vince Gair added reinforcement when he charged Bjelke-Petersen with being too busy making money with his bulldozers to have read the Royal Commission Report into the Creighton affair. There was even a hint of envy in Jack Duggan’s question, ‘... how many people on this side can afford to make use of a private aeroplane to conduct their business and other operations?’ and in Vince Gair’s statement that:

he is in such a good financial position that he is able to continue as a member of Parliament without any great responsibility, because he is in that happy position where 200 [pounds] is neither here nor there to him, where in fact it might embarrass him from the point of view of taxation, he adopts the attitude of the injured innocent.

The liveliest interjections, however, came from Tom Aikens. In response to a question from Bjelke-Petersen as to whether Aikens shared any of his salary, the latter responded: ‘I exhibit more philanthropy with my salary than the hon. member for Barambah, who has a very unenviable reputation where the disbursement of money is concerned.’ By suggesting that Bjelke-Petersen was miserly, Aikens lends some support to Vic Sullivan’s account of Bjelke-Petersen’s reasons for rejecting the parliamentary superannuation scheme.

On another occasion, during a lengthy debate on SP betting, Aikens flashed a question to Bjelke-Petersen which revealed further knowledge of his business dealings: ‘How much money did you make
recently out of gambling in oil shares?"102 This line of questioning was pursued by F. E. Roberts, the Labor member for Nundah, who interjected during a Bjelke-Petersen speech on the search for oil: ‘Do you call it a sphere of investigation or a sphere of gambling?’103 Under further probing from Aikens on the question of whether he gambled in oil exploration shares, Bjelke-Petersen replied firmly: ‘I never have and I never intend to.’104 Evidence suggests, however, that from 1959 to 1969 Bjelke-Petersen profited substantially from sales of oil shares in circumstances that might easily be construed as a conflict of interest.105 Despite his denial of stock exchange dealings, his interest in oil exploration was sufficient to persuade the Labor member for Baroona to portray him as an ‘advocate of the oil companies’.106 Tom Aikens went further when he accused Bjelke-Petersen of having a pecuniary interest in Australian National Airlines (ANA). During a speech on the 1950 (Air Transport) Bill, Bjelke-Petersen had advocated competition against the federal government-owned TAA, which he described in highly critical terms.107 Aikens argued that Standing Orders ‘state that any member possessing a pecuniary interest in the subject matter of legislation is not entitled to speak on it’.108 Aikens, while overruled by the Speaker, had made his point.

Bjelke-Petersen himself made frequent references to his business dealings as a farmer and entrepreneur.109 He was, after all, an ambitious man and one who probably hoped to alert his parliamentary leader and senior members of the parliament to his experience. As well as informing his superiors of his talents, Bjelke-Petersen also flattered many of the ministers, bureaucrats and constituents with whom he dealt.110 Such courtesies were characteristic of parliaments of an earlier era and a perusal of Hansard of the time reveals that it was a common ploy for parliamentarians desirous of advancement to shower praise on senior party colleagues. Bill Hewitt, who entered the Queensland Parliament in 1966, noticed that every member ended his speech by complimenting the relevant minister despite the fact that some of them were ‘very ordinary’ and were paid handsomely to do their jobs.111
Notes
4. ibid.
5. ibid., p. 161. Zaleznik in his article refers to United States presidents. Some avoid this pattern of behaviour because they have a ‘protective shield’ by belonging to an established elite, like Roosevelt, to a political machine, like Truman, or to an organisation such as the military, like Eisenhower. Zaleznik argues that self-made men are especially prone to this career split.
13. Bjelke-Petersen, pers. comm. As the next chapter illustrates, Sir Robert Sparkes shared this organisational facility.
18. J. Harrison, *Faith in the Sunshine State: Joh Bjelke-Petersen and the Religious Culture of Queensland*, PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 1991, p. 219. In evidence, Harrison cites the *Kingaroy Herald*. Back copies of the newspaper have since been destroyed in a fire. Hugh Bingham, his media adviser in the early days of the premiership, recalls hearing about this early candidature but remembers no details. I have no reason to doubt Harrison, but Sir Robert Sparkes, who knew nothing of the incident, contacted Evan Adermann, son of Bjelke-Petersen’s mentor, Sir Charles. Evan Adermann knew nothing of this
contest and was of the view that Bjelke-Petersen had never been defeated. For confirmation that he won endorsement at a second attempt, see G. Chamberlin, *Canberra Survey*, vol. 29, no. 11, 19 November 1976.


22. Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Kingaroy Shire Council, held in the Council Chambers, Kingaroy, 12 May 1946.


24. ibid.


26. ibid.

27. ibid., p. 225.


29. 'The Joh Tapes on Leadership', op. cit.


32. This statement should be qualified in the case of Gair who alienated the leadership of the Australian Workers Union, with whom the ALP in Queensland had traditionally been in close alliance.


35. ibid., p. 456.

36. ibid., p. 447.

37. ibid., p. 453.


40. B. Costar, 'Vincent Clair Gair' in Murphy, Joyce and Cribb, op. cit., pp. 466, 459; Fitzgerald and Thornton, op. cit., pp. 58, 155.

41. For an account of the factors involved in Gair's downfall, see Costar, op. cit., pp. 459–75.
44. Hughes, op. cit., p. 174.
45. Bjelke-Petersen, op. cit., p. 79.
46. Stevenson, op. cit., p. 486.
48. ibid.
49. Hughes, op. cit., p. 173.
50. ibid., p. 147.
51. Hazlehurst, op. cit., p. 80.
52. ibid., p. 82.
57. ibid.
62. ibid., p. 987.
78. ibid.
79. Lunn, op. cit., p. 266.
84. Lack, op. cit., p. 363.
87. ibid., p. 1941.
88. ibid.
90. pers. comm., February 1992. Vic Sullivan’s recollections may have been coloured by his dismissal from cabinet and the deputy leadership as well as by events revealed by the Fitzgerald Inquiry.
93. In the 1949 redistribution, Bjelke-Petersen’s electorate changed from Nanango to Barambah.
94. He made this remark to Hugh Bingham. pers. comm., August 1997.
95. Sullivan made the point ‘... well, in his own business, he gave a lot of time to that too, you know’. Pers. comm., February 1992.
96. Hazlehurst, op. cit., p. 96.
103. ibid., p. 323.
104. ibid., p. 324.
108. ibid., p. 174.
109. See, for example, Queensland, Legislative Assembly 1948–49, Debates, vol. 194,


CHAPTER 5

IN GOVERNMENT

After the fall of the Gair Government the possibility for advancement into the ministry beckoned. This depended initially on Bjelke-Petersen’s colleagues but, after 1961, and a change of rules, Nicklin was enabled to select his ministry personally. As a government backbencher, Bjelke-Petersen pursued the same themes, but, with a ministry in his sights, continued to emphasise his talents and to flatter the Premier and other ministers.

In his first contribution to debate as a member of the government, he acknowledged the great pleasure the occasion brought him and criticised the previous Labor government who ‘were in office for so many years that their vision became obscured and they did not know where they were going’. As a consequence, they had failed in their charter to develop the state. He also praised the Premier of South Australia, Thomas Playford, and the Premier of Victoria, Henry Bolte, populist premiers with little formal education, whose governments supported ‘people of enterprise who are prepared to invest money and take risks’. He advocated concessional freight rates to encourage the development of industries in rural towns, drew attention to the high costs associated with the 40-hour week, and deplored the labour movement’s apparent sympathy with communism and its ‘“down” on the ambitious man’. All this was the stock in trade of a right-wing rural member determined not to be overlooked after a decade on the opposition backbench.

The piety and paternalism that he had absorbed from his father remained in his continued opposition to the liberalisation of liquor
legislation and the legalisation of off-course betting. His view of
government, expressed in the context of his opposition to Sunday
drinking, was that it should ‘protect people from themselves as far as
possible’. Governments’s main role, however, lay in ‘expanding and
developing the state’. He urged overseas investment on the grounds
that ‘as long as the land is developed it is all to the good of the state’.
The desire to preserve the culture of his youth and childhood sat
uneasily with the urge to change the state’s physical landscape by
development, but neither he nor his colleagues, then or later, per­
ceived the tension. Bjelke-Petersen advocated both robustly, drawing
on the utilitarian strand in the state’s political culture to provide the
link between asceticism and development. Wasting time and money
on gambling, drink and leisure were, to Bjelke-Petersen, clearly
injurious to that personal and state development on which long-term
happiness depended. Over time, Bjelke-Petersen modified his public
stance on gambling and alcohol, but remained committed to hard
work and state development. This reflected the approach of his own
party, which, once in office, had softened its opposition to drink and
gambling. By the 1963 state election, even the pressure groups were
silent on the issue. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, for
Bjelke-Petersen, an increased facility for marrying his own concerns
with those of his constituents came with political experience. Many
of his constituents undoubtedly enjoyed a drink and a ‘flutter’, but
nevertheless endorsed hard work and material progress. His govern­
ment was to liberalise drinking and gambling laws and ease restric­
tions on Sunday trading.

Because his upbringing had taught him that Sunday was sacrosanct,
he initially opposed Sunday trading because its effect would be ‘to
change the whole character of our Sundays’. There were other
changes which he also resisted. For example, he was concerned that
the legalising of off-course betting might cause young people to
squander their earnings, especially as the 40-hour week had brought
them increased leisure. He drew a parallel with the attempts by
communists to destroy ‘our way of life’ and the destruction likely to
be wrought by the liberalisation of drink laws. A possible solution
to some of these problems, he believed, could be found in Bible Study
at school, which he advocated strongly but on utilitarian rather than
moral grounds: 'very rarely does one find that a boy or girl who has been brought up with a Christian understanding and a Christian appreciation becomes a trouble or a burden to the State.' Physical health also remained a concern. In one instance, he was able to promote his electorate’s staple crop when he asked members to do all they could ‘to advertise the food value of the humble peanut’. In support, he cited Dr Washington Carver of the United States ‘who said he was sure that if people would eat a small handful of peanuts every day they would never suffer from rheumatism’.

As a government backbencher there was even more reason to flatter his superiors who might hold the key to a cabinet position. He continued to rain praise on the Premier, members of the ministry and senior bureaucrats. One of those he commended was his partner in oil exploration, Ernie Evans, the Minister for Development, Mines, Main Roads and Electricity. On the subject of the Petroleum Acts Amendment Bill, which was designed to increase interest in searching for oil in Queensland, Bjelke-Petersen told the parliament that the Minister ‘has gained considerable experience in and appreciation of the problem in the course of the three years’ activities that he and I had in this field when we had authority to prospect an area of country round Mackay’. He went on to congratulate his parliamentary and business colleague on his wisdom ‘in his dealings with the various oil companies, particularly in his suggestion acted upon by the Federal Government that money spent on the search for oil should be allowed as a tax concession’. He chastised the doubters in the Opposition who feared that oil would not be found and quoted from the 35th chapter of Isaiah: ‘Say no to them that are of fearful heart: be strong, fear not.’ Such was the political culture of the era that revelations of conflict of interest provoked no outrage and did nothing to tarnish Nicklin’s reputation as a premier of great probity who enforced ministerial accountability. Later in the same session Bjelke-Petersen again commended the Minister for Mines, his Under Secretary and his officers ‘on their initiative and help in the search for oil’. He also thanked the Minister and the staff of the Department of Main Roads for work in his electorate and expressed the certainty that the Minister would soon help with a good road to the Bunya Mountains.
had a vested interest in such a road. Indeed, he had bought the land in the expectation that a road would come. Such conflicts of interest raised not a ripple of parliamentary or public concern.

References to his own experiences were as frequent as they had ever been, although it is possible that the relentless self-promotion was somewhat counter-productive. Nicklin reportedly referred to Bjelke-Petersen as a ‘self-aggrandising Pharisee’. On the issues of the conversion of leasehold land to freehold and a road transport levy, however, Bjelke-Petersen chose not to act in a manner designed to please or flatter the Premier. These were early examples of his refusal to budge once he had made up his mind. His strong stand provoked the displeasure of Nicklin and Chalk, but won the support of rural voters. During this period, the normally deferential, ascendant politician gave a hint of the premier he was to become.

The road transport levy was a complex issue which remained on the boil for a number of years. Before market forces were given the primacy they have today, all Australian governments believed that they had a duty to protect state railways from competition from road haulage firms. They did this through a system of licensing which effectively allowed them to limit competition and maintain revenue, the majority of their income coming from the transport of goods and livestock. In 1954, however, the Privy Council ruled that such legislation contravened Section 92 of the Constitution, that all trade between states shall be absolutely free. In order to obtain the protection of Section 92 and to avoid paying licences, road hauliers engaged in a range of practices, the most popular of which was ‘border hopping’, crossing the border into New South Wales, or pretending to have done so. The Queensland Government countered this practice with a new tax (designed to conform with Section 92) on all trucks with a load capacity of more than four tons. Because this included farm trucks driven on public roads, it provoked a barrage of opposition and, prior to the 1957 election, Nicklin promised to increase exemptions from the tax for primary producers. Over the next few years there were modifications to the legislation, but the rumblings of discontent continued. In 1961 the Acting Transport Minister, H. W. Noble, appointed four Country Party members, one of whom was
Bjelke-Petersen, to investigate this matter, which was increasingly damaging the government.\textsuperscript{27}

As one author wrote:

In one of those surges of passion and self-interest that periodically sweep through outback Australia, Country Party members in southern and central Queensland were increasingly finding a sense of purpose in opposition to the government's transport policies. As the protest grew and gathered momentum it became for a short time an audience and a constituency awaiting a leader ... Into this arena of discontent stepped the little known Country Party member for Barambah ...\textsuperscript{28}

During the new government's first parliament Bjelke-Petersen had announced that he was not happy with such a road tax.\textsuperscript{29} He felt that it was a particularly strong impost on people living in country areas, 'the hard-working section because of the long hours they work'.\textsuperscript{30} Undoubtedly he was under pressure from constituents to act on their behalf and in mid-1961 he accepted an invitation to be one of a number of speakers at a rally in Dalby which both Nicklin and Chalk had declined to attend. Bjelke-Petersen was the ninth scheduled speaker. His characteristic speaking style is evident in this early effort:

Being here tonight as I am as a member of the government I am not here to, well, defend the minister as it were. But I'm here merely to, well, hear the various arguments ... No, I, Sir agree 100 per cent that it's good to organise, it's good to see you here tonight, to hear your views, to get to know your attitude, the way you think in relation to the laws in our particular state. I myself am a farmer, and as such I believe very definitely in private enterprise ... I believe in modern transport ... I believe, Mr. Chairman that we can't hold back progress ... I want to say that I do not for a minute, if what Mr. Bolton [a Toowoomba transport operator and leading opponent of Gordon Chalk] says is correct and I feel sure he's expressed his views here as he is experiencing at the moment that under the present legislation the government and this Act is killing transport, is killing this industry, is killing other industries. Now, I say sir, that you can rest assured that I and some of us at least will fight with [sic] them to see that this doesn't happen. There's not two doubts about that. (Applause). My word, we'll fight hard, don't make any mistake about that.\textsuperscript{31}
The discontent about the issue deepened and Nicklin and Chalk could no longer avoid facing their troubled constituents. A month after the Dalby meeting, in July 1961, they journeyed further west to Roma to put the government’s case. Bjelke-Petersen was also a speaker. He recalls that Nicklin and Chalk were ‘howled down’ by the crowd. In contrast, the whole hall roared its agreement with him. At the end of the evening Bjelke-Petersen asked for a ride back to Brisbane in Chalk’s ministerial car. Chalk’s magnanimity in agreeing failed to deter Bjelke-Petersen from continuing to oppose the government on the transport issue. He proclaimed in parliament that the policy was out of line with previous policies and Country Party policy. In addition, he argued, it was out of step with progress which ‘is like the tide of the sea — you cannot stem it or stop it’. He went so far as to agree on some aspects of the problem with the Leader of the Opposition and, by implication, criticise the Minister for Transport. He was so convinced that his position was right that he took the rather confrontationist step of counselling the Minister and the government:

... to make every effort to meet the wishes of the people who are paying these fees, such as the primary producers, and also those actually engaged in the transport business ... I have never supported the Bill and I do not intend to do so on this occasion on the mere assumption that so-and-so will be done in the future.

In this early policy fight, characteristics that were to mark Bjelke-Petersen’s leadership style as premier can be detected. Once sure that he was right, he was unwilling to change his views. He was not always totally inflexible, as his attitudes to liquor and gambling show, but on some issues he would not budge. In his stand at Dalby and Roma his inflexibility won support, and despite, or because of, his unpolished speech, he was able to tap into grassroots sentiment and communicate with the rural Queenslanders gathered before him.

The triumphs in the West were not without cost. Bjelke-Petersen had antagonised Nicklin by his public opposition to the government’s policies. Thirty years later he recalled:

He [Frank Nicklin] just ignored me and pushed me out and put me into the back for six years. He put other Ministers in as Premier but anyhow
... he made me wait for six years. I didn’t reciprocal [sic]. I kept on working hard and sort of making myself pretty indispensable ...

He was passed over on a number of occasions in favour of men who had been in parliament for a comparatively short time. Vic Sullivan remembers some of these occasions:

Johnny Row became Minister for Primary Industries fairly quickly, say within three years I think it was when Otto Madsen died ... it was a geographic appointment; they needed a Minister in North Queensland ... The next one was Ron Camm — again geographically because Ron had only been in four years ... Ronny Camm was from Proserpine so there needed to be a Minister in that area. Now Joh was much senior to them but you know he missed out and he missed out a few times! I think he was paying a bit of the penalty for his disloyalty ...

As Premier, Bjelke-Petersen treated Mike Ahern in the same fashion. Sullivan suggests that it may have taken Bjelke-Petersen even longer to acquire a cabinet post if this had depended on election, ‘because he wasn’t a popular bloke with the members’. This is confirmed by his defeat in 1960 in a ballot to replace Alf Muller as Lands Minister. Bjelke-Petersen was one of seven candidates but was eliminated early. As with his early plebiscite loss, this defeat has been expunged from Bjelke-Petersen’s published recollections, although he did concede in a newspaper interview that he was ‘intensely disliked by [his] own party’ because of his stands on freeing up leasehold land and on road transport. In the former case, he had campaigned for the conversion of rural leasehold land to freehold, a 1957 election promise that Nicklin had reneged on because of its budgetary implications. His unpopularity may also have had something to do with his perceived disloyalty, his vigorous self-promotion and the personal asceticism which made it difficult for him to socialise with many of his colleagues. Over the next eight years he turned around such perceptions sufficiently to be elected to the deputy premiership, undoubtedly assisted by the favour bank he was able to build as Minister for Works and Housing and, perhaps, by drawing on the charm he was capable of exercising.

Bjelke Petersen found the lack of autonomy associated with outsider status frustrating and he ‘began to think the only way to get
things done was to get up there and into Cabinet myself’ .

Competition for cabinet posts was keen. Bill Gunn, later to become Bjelke-Petersen’s deputy — and Ahern’s and Russell Cooper’s — recalls that for a backbencher ‘a cabinet minister is out of this world because all his expenses are paid, his cars, he’s got chauffeurs, everything you could think of’. Bjelke-Petersen finally succeeded in his goal, but not before being passed over for Primary Industries to which he thought he would be well suited. In September 1963 Nicklin appointed him as Minister for Works and Housing. He was 52 years of age. It was likely that Nicklin wanted Bjelke-Petersen on side rather than on the outer causing trouble for the government as he had over road taxes. Rebellious cabinet ministers are easier to control than rebellious backbenchers and Bjelke-Petersen had done his penance by being kept out of cabinet in favour of relative newcomers. In addition, when it came to making a choice for the ministry, Nicklin was not confronted by a range of talent. Bjelke-Petersen recalls that he was given the job on condition that he immediately sack 400 men. He accepted and ‘left Frank’s office feeling sorry for the men who were to lose their jobs but pleased about my own good fortune’. For an ambitious politician, appointment to any ministry was a vital step. For Bjelke-Petersen, the fact that the appointment was to Works and Housing was crucial for his later deployment of patronage.

The cabinet Bjelke-Petersen joined consisted of thirteen ministers whose deliberations encompassed matters both trivial and momentous. The Nicklin Government was the first state government in Australia to establish a Cabinet Secretariat, whose task it was to keep records of cabinet meetings. The minutes show how interventionist governments of all political persuasions in Queensland were prior to the embrace of economic rationalism. For example, in the seven months from June to December in 1965 cabinet pledged assistance to farmers affected by drought, and deliberated on the milk quota for Brisbane, the allocation of tobacco quotas, increased taxi fares, the licensing of tow-truck operators and the collection of the Commonwealth Hen Levy which was to go to state egg boards to equalise the returns from the local sale, and export, of eggs. The Minister for Primary Industries, John Row, offered an explanation for such intervention, illustrating the huge shifts that have occurred
in conventional economic wisdom: ‘at present egg producers who do not market through boards enjoy the benefits of a reasonable local price without making any contribution to export losses.’

Cabinet met once a week, usually on a Tuesday but on a Monday during parliamentary sittings. The submissions and related decisions were numerous. For example, between 2 June and 17 August 1964, 311 decisions were taken, and 267 between 21 December, 1964 and 15 March 1965. These varied in import and length. Submissions ranged from a single page to those incorporating proposed legislation and other attachments. Occasionally, submissions were presented orally, as were Frank Nicklin’s throughout the industrial strife at Mt Isa. Among other things, ministers dealt with numerous submissions involving the purchase of vehicles for various government departments and agencies, with appeals over promotion in the police force (including in 1967 an appeal against the promotion of Detective Sergeant Second Class Terry Lewis to the rank of Detective Sergeant First Class), with requests for approval of official overseas travel for ministers and government employees, and with the extension of the services past retirement age of various teachers, matrons and wardsmen. Cabinet noted lists from various departments concerning deferred recreation leave owing to staff. In an era of line item budgeting, ministers had to approve transfers of expenditure within departments. They considered the government float in the Warana Festival and whether notepaper and envelopes used by judges of the High Court should be embossed. Ministers were even required to agree to the amendment of the Health (Food Hygiene) Act to ban the wrapping of fish and chips in newspaper.

They also dealt with more significant issues such as taxation, education and Aboriginal affairs. On the last topic, attitudes towards indigenous Australians were nowhere better illustrated than in a submission to cabinet from the Police Minister, Alex Dewar, dealing with an application from a Torres Strait Islander to join the police force. An attachment from the Police Commissioner recommended against such an appointment because ‘I feel that there would be a strong reaction … by some members of our society if they were to be subjected to interrogation or investigation by other than “white” Police Officers …’ Despite the misgivings of the Commissioner,
cabinet approved the appointment, not because the failure to do so would be discriminatory but for fear of criticism. Such pragmatic considerations also coloured cabinet's consideration of voting rights for Aborigines. A submission by Education Minister Jack Pizzey canvassed a range of options, including separate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander electorates. Representatives from these proposed electorates, however, would have the right to vote only on issues directly linked with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs. The most important consideration, however, was that full-blood Aborigines were excluded from the population for the purpose of calculating Financial Assistance Grant Programs. Cabinet recommended that full-blood Aborigines be excluded from voting until such time as they were counted for this end.58

Cabinet also wrestled with the issue of equal rights for women. After considering a report by the Public Service Commissioner, cabinet opted to retain the existing and unequal arrangements with respect to the employment of women in the State Public Service. The arguments that cabinet found persuasive were unequivocal:

In considering the employment of women in the Public Service it must be recognised that the Public Service is a 'career' service and that the vast majority of women by reason of their physiological and psychological constitution are inherently home-makers and not career-makers ... There is the further factor of the resentment by male officers of female officers and to create such a dominance would be striking at the very fundamental laws of nature.59

Women would continue to be paid less for equivalent work and to have their permanent employment terminated upon marriage when 'their interests would be transferred to their homes and families'.60 Cabinet members also considered the social implications of married women's re-employment, which, the Public Service Commissioner assured them, 'must surely add to the incidence of lack of parental control'.61 In this era, women like Maren Bjelke-Petersen acted as the prevailing role model and continued to do so well into Bjelke-Petersen's premiership. In 1977 the Rockhampton City Council sacked a female library employee upon her marriage. Sixteen other local authorities maintained the same practice.62
The issue of jury service for women provides additional insight into the patriarchal nature of Queensland government and society. Despite considering the matter for almost a year, Ministers were unable to agree to give women equal rights with men to serve on juries. In 1967 women were finally admitted to jury service, although they could be exempted ‘by reason of issues to be tried’. In 1996 Queensland was the last Australian state or territory to remove blanket exemptions for women. Cabinet appeared more relaxed, however, about giving approval for the wives of Members of Parliament to attend a Garden Party for the visiting Governor-General and his wife, Lord and Lady Casey.

Bjelke-Petersen’s first cabinet submission recommended the purchase of the Courier-Mail property at the corner of William and Margaret Streets in Brisbane. He advised his colleagues that ‘the acquisition of this property would result in the Governmental or Semi-Governmental ownership of all properties in the area with the exception of the Belle-Vue Hotel and William Collins’. In 1967 the Belle-Vue was acquired and, as Premier, Bjelke-Petersen went on to complete this early task of developing a government precinct with the controversial demolition of the Belle-Vue. Another cabinet submission from the period indicates the attitude of Bjelke-Petersen — and his cabinet colleagues — towards conservation. They agreed that the Water Police Building, believed to have been built by convict labour, should be demolished.

Compared with other ministers, Bjelke-Petersen brought few submissions to cabinet during this period. According to a senior public servant of the time, Bjelke-Petersen did not do his homework very well on either his own submissions or those of others. He was ‘easy going, unaggressive, courteous and quietly spoken’. Sir Robert Sparkes thought him at this time ‘a modest sort of fellow’ with no ambition to proceed further. Nevertheless, two public servants who worked closely with him noticed qualities that might take him further. David Longland, Under Secretary of the Works Department, admired his minister’s ‘rapid grasp of problems and firm policy direction over the state’s building programme’. Keith Spann, head of the Premier’s Department, predicted that Bjelke-Petersen would one day be premier. Such prescience was not shared by the elector-
ate as a whole. A survey conducted in 1966 designed to test voter recognition of ministers showed that less than 10 per cent of the sample recognised Bjelke-Petersen. He could derive some consolation from the fact that he was more readily recognised than Harold Richter, Ron Camm and John Row.72

Most of Bjelke-Petersen’s submissions dealt with the purchase of land and construction of public buildings such as courthouses, Housing Commission issues, and the transfer of funds from one line item to another. Many of the matters that ultimately involved his portfo­lio, such as the construction of schools and hospitals, were brought to cabinet by the relevant ministers. It is difficult to gain much insight into Bjelke-Petersen’s character from these early submissions because they are so mechanical in nature. One document that does give a hint of his own feelings is a submission which he brought to cabinet on the supply of projectors and radio and television sets to medium-security prisons. Although Bjelke-Petersen does not make his opposition explicit, it is clear that he had doubts about the provision of entertainment facilities to prison inmates. His cabinet colleagues, however, were less puritanical and approved the purchase.73

As the relevant minister, Bjelke-Petersen introduced a number of bills to parliament. These were uncontroversial, involving amendments to the Co-operative Housing Societies Acts,74 Building Societies Acts75 and the State Housing Act,76 extensions to the Commonwealth and State Housing Agreement Bill,77 the introduction of the Chiropractors Bill,78 and, after the death of Ernie Evans, the Alcan Queensland Pty Limited Agreement Bill, which authorised the government to enter into an agreement with Alcan to construct an alumina plant at Gladstone.79 For the most part, questioning from the opposition was desultory, but occasionally aspects of Bjelke-Petersen’s character were revealed. His personal asceticism was evident in the observation that:

whereas in the olden days many of us had to acquire those things at a much slower rate, most people now expect to start off with them. The desire to have all the extra amenities is one of the reasons why today both husband and wife go to work.80
His attitude towards the environment was typical of the era, when development and progress, at any cost, were prioritised. Although acknowledging a great love of trees, he conceded that they had to be cleared from housing estates because of the difficulties associated with building and road construction. Of considerable interest, given his prior opposition to Labor's electoral weightage and his later refinement of it, is his defence of deviations from the principle of equal representation. He dealt with the difficulties of representing people in vast electorates and also raised a favourite, but undemocratic, Country Party argument that people who are wealth producers deserve a greater say in government. He told parliament that 'a comparison of the value to the State, in production, of 100 people in the city and 100 people in the country justifies a continuation of our present system ...' The great advantage of a portfolio like Works and Housing for an ambitious man was the opportunity for doing favours. The Department of Works was responsible for the design, construction and furnishing of all government buildings and the maintenance of the government's capital assets. The Housing portfolio encompassed all Housing Commission construction in the state, including houses for defence personnel, public servants and, more controversially, the employees of major developers such as Queensland Alumina. Members of parliament always need to create the impression in their electorate that they can achieve benefits for their constituents. At the local level, schools, police stations and public housing are important, both in themselves and for the employment that such construction and maintenance creates. As Works and Housing Minister, Bjelke-Petersen had dealings throughout the state, across departments, and, according to him, with every member of parliament from both sides of the house. Vic Sullivan, however, does not recall such even-handedness: 'I don't think Labor got a lot in their electorate when Joh was Minister for Works ... He was pretty ruthless in that regard.' Sullivan's recollection is consistent with Bjelke-Petersen's later behaviour, when premier.

As far as government members were concerned, Bjelke-Petersen was a very good Works and Housing Minister. He met with backbenchers every Tuesday morning. Sullivan has suggested that Bjelke-
Petersen’s Departmental Under Secretary, David Longland, should receive some of the credit for advising the fledgling minister of the strategic advantage of serving backbenchers to win their support. Bjelke-Petersen made a practice of responding to requests promptly, using the telephone, rather than writing, to get things done:

If you asked me to do something in the morning, say at the school at the back of beyond, I’d ring you either tonight or during the day and say: ‘Well look, I’ve had that checked out ... It’s on the program. You can forget about it.’ ... the boys, that is the members, had all learned that point.*

Because of the reputation for reliability and efficiency which Bjelke-Petersen acquired in the Works and Housing portfolio, ministers going overseas would ask him to look after their departments.* In this fashion, he enlarged his experience and number of contacts by acting as Minister for Education, Police, Aboriginal and Island Affairs, Local Government and Conservation, and Labour and Industry.

In 1968 Frank Nicklin retired and Jack Pizzey was elected unanimously as Premier. Bjelke-Petersen contested the Deputy Leadership of the Country Party against Ron Camm, the Minister for Main Roads, and Alan Fletcher, the Minister for Lands and Irrigation. Bjelke-Petersen won without needing to go to preferences. He had the support of Pizzey who nevertheless had some concerns about the potential for distraction and possible embarrassment as a result of Bjelke-Petersen’s business interests.* His win came as something of a surprise to many because of his hitherto low public profile.* In his autobiography, Bjelke-Petersen maintains his customary position of surprise at his success and retains the fiction of being drafted:

... to my surprise (for there were several other Country Party ministers more senior than me) I was elected on the first vote, without even the help of preferences. What made it more surprising was that I had not lobbied any of the others beforehand for their support.*

He had, however, been working towards such an opportunity for many years. As both his early career and his premiership demonstrate, he was never reluctant to chase the numbers. In conversation, he
conceded that his win was partly anticipated because 'the boys were always coming to me for help. They came to me like bees to a honey pot when I was Works and Housing Minister'. Despite this knowledge, and his advancement to third ranking minister after Pizzey and Chalk, Bjelke-Petersen claims that he never imagined he would one day be premier:

Never even thought about it. Never even worried about it, because first of all in those days it looked like Jack Pizzey, he was about 50 or about 51 or 52, right in the prime, big strong man. Nobody would ever think that he would drop over with a heart attack, so it never entered my mind.

Pizzey, however, had already suffered a heart attack in September 1962, causing one observer to suggest that his strong chance of succeeding Nicklin as Premier had been weakened, and another to report that speculation about Nicklin's eventual retirement had been quietened. Gordon Chalk also notes that, with Pizzey's health in doubt, 'an unexpectedly large gap had opened at the top of the principal party in coalition'. In this context, Bjelke-Petersen's ingenuousness strains credibility. Although he may never have anticipated Pizzey's death, it is highly likely that a man committed to forward thinking, forward planning and 'being miles ahead of anybody else' would have given some thought to the ultimate prize of the premiership.

In July 1968 Jack Pizzey died of a heart attack. His death was announced at Brisbane's annual police ball where it was reported that 'one guest, Johannes Bjelke-Petersen, a deeply religious man, obscure Country Party deputy for the six months Pizzey had been Premier, said to no one in particular that he had “been called” '. Pizzey's death left a gap which two ambitious men hoped to fill. Deputy Premier, Liberal leader, Treasurer and Bjelke-Petersen's antagonist on the road tax issue, Gordon Chalk, was sworn in as caretaker premier for a week, but it is clear that he hoped for more permanent tenure. As the preparations for Pizzey's funeral commenced, Chalk and Bjelke-Petersen skirmished over the acting premiership and the ultimate prize of the premiership. Bjelke-Petersen argued that, as the leader of the senior party, he should have been sworn in as acting
premier, whereas the Governor had sworn in Chalk, the then Deputy Premier who had acted as premier when Nicklin or Pizzey travelled overseas. The Governor had behaved appropriately because Bjelke-Petersen had not yet been elected as leader of the Country Party in Pizzey’s place, but Bjelke-Petersen has always portrayed Chalk’s actions at this time as opportunistic. For his part, Chalk wanted to capitalise on his incumbency and greater experience to remain premier. In this he apparently had the support of many of Bjelke-Petersen’s Country Party colleagues, but Bjelke-Petersen was not prepared to give up his prize without a fight. He refused to form a coalition government unless he was sworn in as premier, and, two days after Pizzey’s death, despite his recorded aversion to lobbying, gathered the parliamentary party together. Some, like Bill Hewitt, were impressed by Bjelke-Petersen’s initial claim: ‘I don’t want you to work for me; I want you to work with me.’ Others ‘were lured by the prospect of being chosen by their prospective leader as his personal nominee for the cabinet seat left vacant by Pizzey’s death’. Chalk bowed to the inevitable and on 7 August 1968 Johannes Bjelke-Petersen became Premier of Queensland. The Courier-Mail described him thus: ‘a pleasant, persuasive talker, he is thought to be unworldly, but he has an alert political brain and an ability to organise.’ He was also well attuned to his electorate’s concerns. His enthusiasm for development, allied with his pragmatism and anti-intellectualism, harmonised with the attitudes and expectations of community members, few of whom had demonstrated alarm at the disregard for civil liberties, politicians’ conflicts of interest, and the poor parliamentary standards that prevailed in their state. No longer ascendant, he had no need to be deferential. It was some time before he found his feet as premier, but once he had he left no doubt that Queensland yet again had a premier cast in the authoritarian mould.

Notes
2. Queensland, Legislative Assembly 1957–58, Debates, vol. 218, p. 84.
3. ibid., p. 87.
4. ibid, p. 891.
6. ibid., pp. 24, 27.
8. ibid., p. 686.
11. By the 1960s there was a sea change on these liquor/gambling questions in most Australasian jurisdictions, for example 10 pm closing in Victoria in 1964 and New Zealand in 1968. It is part of the changing nature of value politics in this period of which the abolition of capital punishment (elsewhere in Australia) is a part.
14. ibid., p. 1182.
16. ibid., p. 1187.
17. For example, see Queensland, Legislative Assembly 1957–58, Debates, vol. 219, pp. 471, 473, 891.
20. ibid.
21. ibid., p. 270.
23. ibid., vol. 222, p. 1312.
24. ibid.
26. This statement cannot be verified. It was told by Sir Thomas Hiley to a source who wishes to remain anonymous.
27. The others were Vic Sullivan, V. E. Jones and Otto Madsen.
35. ibid., vol. 231, p. 1364.
36. ibid., vol. 232, p. 2597.
40. Hazlehurst, op. cit., p. 197.
41. Gagliardi, loc. cit.
42. Bjelke-Petersen, pers. comm., October 1993.
45. J. Bjelke-Petersen, *Don't You Worry About That!*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1990, p. 76, According to Bjelke-Petersen, he accepted the advice of his department head, David Longland, that he could not immediately dismiss such a large number of men. At a later date Nicklin insisted that his edict be carried out.
47. Queensland, *Confidential Cabinet Minute*, 15 June 1965, Decision no. 6852.
53. ibid.
57. Queensland, *Confidential Cabinet Minute*, 19 May 1964, Decision no. 6398.
60. ibid.
61. ibid.
63. Queensland, *Confidential Cabinet Minute*, 27 September 1965, decision no. 8196; Queensland, *Confidential Cabinet Minute*, 29 August 1966, Decision no. 9337. Women had the right to apply to the Electoral Office if they desired to serve as jurors.
64. Marion Sawer, Women's Admission to Jury Service in Australia and New Zealand, Australasian Political Studies Association Annual Conference, Perth, 1996.
65. Queensland, *Confidential Cabinet Minute*, 1 November 1965, Decision no. 8321.
67. Queensland, *Confidential Cabinet Minute*, 27 April 1964, Decision no. 6325.
70. Hazlehurst, loc. cit.
71. ibid.
72. Hughes, op. cit., p. 139. Hughes observes that the near anonymity of some Country Party ministers might be reversed in country electorates where their portfolios matter more (p. 140).
73. Queensland, *Confidential Cabinet Minute*, 5 October Decision no. 6889.
76. ibid., p. 2380.
77. ibid., vol. 243, p. 473.
78. ibid., vol. 245, p. 2714.
81. ibid., vol. 243, p. 495.
84. Bjelke-Petersen, record of interview with G. Chamberlin, 10 January 1979.
85. Bjelke-Petersen, op. cit., p. 80.
86. Hazlehurst, op. cit., p. 229.
88. Bjelke-Petersen, op. cit., p. 83.
89. Bjelke-Petersen, pers. comm., October 1993.
90. ibid.
94. There was at the time no legally constituted position as ‘Deputy Premier’. See Hazlehurst, op. cit., p. 230.
95. Bjelke-Petersen, op. cit., p. 86.
THE extensive literature devoted to political leadership agrees about little except that it involves influence, authority, power and control over others. The parental, school and religious authority to which Bjelke-Petersen was exposed as a child, and his experience of the power wielded by Queensland’s political leaders, meant that he equated office with the exercise of power. He is reported as saying that the premiership was a great job because ‘you can do anything you like’. For much of his term of office he was guided in what he did by a small network of advisers with good strategic and tactical skills. The most important of these was ‘Queensland’s other strong man’, National Party President Sir Robert Sparkes. Whatever their differences, Bjelke-Petersen and Sparkes shared the agenda of winning elections and, when their interests converged, theirs was a formidable partnership. Although their relationship was never warm, their association had a symbiotic quality. ‘Sparkes and [Mike] Evans could say: “This is what the National Party thinks” and Joh would say: “This is what the government thinks …”’ Each man had his own territory and neither wanted the other’s job. Sparkes and the organisational wing of the party provided the organisational and financial stability that underpinned Bjelke-Petersen’s electoral success. In addition, Sparkes’ interventions and ‘frank and fearless’ advice, which few others had the courage to give, kept the Premier grounded in political reality. When their interests diverged and Bjelke-Petersen
sought advice from a more sycophantic group, the foundations of his success began to crumble.

According to Mike Evans, National Party Secretary from 1970 to 1984, 'Joh Petersen built up his power by virtue of his office, by virtue of his premiership. Bob Sparkes built his power through superior intellect.' To Bill Gunn, Bjelke-Petersen was 'shrewd' whereas Sparkes was 'a very clever man'. Bill Hewitt describes the latter as 'astute'. Like Bjelke-Petersen, Sparkes was a long-term strategist, but his focus was less personal and opportunistic than Bjelke-Petersen's. Sparkes' first priority was the party and this made his support more impartial than that of the coterie of advisers upon whom Bjelke-Petersen relied towards the end of his premiership. Bjelke-Petersen tended to focus more intently on his own survival, but his capacity to dominate the public arena and strike responsive chords in many Queenslanders helped ensure his party's electoral success for almost two decades. This, in turn, guaranteed Sparkes' support.

The culmination of their partnership was the 1983 election which, with the defection of two Liberals, returned a National Party government in its own right. In the fifteen years of his premiership, Bjelke-Petersen learnt from experience and rarely made the same mistake twice. Although often stubborn, he was willing to take advice and modify his position on issues on which his mind was not made up. But as his premiership evolved, his confidence grew, and he became less able to acknowledge the contributions of others to his success and increasingly intolerant of opposition. Such was the political environment in Queensland that his progressive assumption of more and more power and increasingly immoderate policy positions brought no electoral penalty. The 1986 election win seemed to vindicate his leadership style and political judgment. He became less tolerant of Sparkes and relied instead on advisers such as National Party trustee Sir Edward Lyons and his pilot, Beryl Young, who flattered him and encouraged his delusions of grandeur. Sparkes well understood the process, describing what happened in terms of family dynamics:

... the one that goes along and says 'Dad's a great guy' is generally the popular one and the other one says: 'Dad, you're making a mistake here
and you’re making a mistake there’ … Eventually, slowly but surely, they become hostile towards the critic even if it’s constructive criticism.⁹

In Bjelke-Petersen’s case, hubris, inevitably inviting nemesis, took over.

Given Bjelke-Petersen’s socialisation, it was to be expected that, as his confidence grew, he should resent encroachments upon his power. This coloured his relations with Sparkes which also may have been influenced by status difference. Whereas Bjelke-Petersen’s origins lay near the bottom of the rural hierarchy, Sparkes came from the top.¹⁰ His ancestors were landed gentry from Norfolk who migrated to Dubbo in New South Wales. Sparkes’ father, James, moved north to Jandowie in Queensland where he established the family holdings, Dundonald and Lyndley, and became the local shire chairman and Country Party member for Dalby and, later, Aubigny. Robert Sparkes was born in 1929 and was educated at the prestigious Southport School where, unlike Bjelke-Petersen who left school at 14, he completed his senior years. He followed his father into politics, joining the local branch of the Country Party on his return home from boarding school and eventually becoming chair of the Wambo Shire Council.

Allen Callaghan confirms that Sparkes and Bjelke-Petersen never really liked each other and credits status difference as a factor. Bjelke-Petersen belonged to the ‘cocky’ farmer segment of the party and Callaghan suggests that Bjelke-Petersen felt some resentment towards Sparkes based on feelings of inferiority.¹¹ Other observers of the relationship between the two men discount status difference as a factor,¹² but Sparkes’ membership of the squattocracy and his comfortable Anglo-Scottish heritage undoubtedly gave him a natural confidence, and eliminated the need for the compensatory striving of an outsider like Bjelke-Petersen. Sparkes moved in similar circles to Malcolm Fraser and his own politics were always more liberal than Bjelke-Petersen’s, particularly on social issues such as the legalisation of abortion.¹³ On this topic he clashed several times with Rona Joyner, a tireless morals campaigner, whose style and opinions were closer to Bjelke-Petersen’s.¹⁴

Sparkes also appeared more comfortable with the trappings of
wealth than Bjelke-Petersen who, despite his own prosperity, maintained a relatively modest household at Bethany. One observer who was acquainted with both men described Sparkes as a millionaire who ‘knew it’, whereas Bjelke-Petersen’s religious upbringing and ‘man of the people’ style left him reluctant to indulge in ostentatious displays of wealth, at least in his private life. Within the Christian tradition, there is a teaching that the charisma vital to true leadership can best be acquired by those who abandon possessions and titles. Perhaps Bjelke-Petersen intuitively grasped this, for his biographer saw in Bjelke-Petersen ‘a genuine fear that to admit any trappings of affluence [would] in some way detract from his ability to lead’. Sir Edward Lyons told an interviewer that the Premier was reluctant to accept a knighthood because of fears that ‘the people would no longer associate with a political leader so long known simply as Joh’, although this claim warrants a degree of scepticism as it appears possible that Bjelke-Petersen put his own name forward for the imperial honour. Such populist considerations, even if feigned, were far less relevant to an organisational leader like Sparkes.

Nevertheless, despite the differences in social status and style between the two men, their beliefs and goals were sufficiently similar to produce an alliance, albeit sometimes uncomfortable, which survived beyond the ‘Joh for Canberra’ campaign. They also shared similar boyhood handicaps. Sparkes was afflicted by muscle damage to his legs which prevented him from playing sport, and he appears to have offset his physical handicap by toughness and drive. One Brisbane journalist describes him as the Southport School’s ‘resident heavy’ who was responsible for reviving the school’s debating society, an interest shared with the young Bjelke-Petersen. Sparkes’ lack of mobility was a factor in his decision to pursue an organisational rather than a parliamentary political career. It also meant that he was less directly in touch with the electorate than Bjelke-Petersen. According to Evans, his immobility made him a very private person, ‘very clinical in his approach’, whereas Bjelke-Petersen was a ‘people person’ who travelled extensively throughout the state. Evans suggests that in a struggle of intellect ‘Bob Sparkes would win every time but when it came to native cunning and reading the electorate Joh won most of the time … Bob wasn’t a politician. He was a strate-
gist’. Hugh Bingham also recalls Bjelke-Petersen’s ‘farmer cunning’, but adds, ‘I tended to ... underrate his intellectuality but I am not at all sure that I am right because there is something there which I don’t understand ...’

Conceptually, the organisational and parliamentary wings of a party may be considered as separate spheres of activity, united by common goals and a community of interest. In such a model, a duumvirate could rule in harmony, each leader in his own sphere. Political reality, however, teaches differently, and ‘to treat political parties as political unities by definition ... is a dubious assumption’. Given the strong personalities of both Bjelke-Petersen and Sparkes, it was inevitable that, despite their separate spheres of interest, there would be clashes between the party’s political and organisational wings. This was especially likely because the Country/National Parties in Australia were similar to the Labor Party in the strength of the organisational wing and their application of rules of solidarity and discipline. Although the shared interests of parliamentary and organisational branches of the party meant that the disciplinary machinery was rarely needed, it was there when required. It would be false, however, to suggest that the only divisions within the National Party were between the organisational and parliamentary wings. Frequently there were rumblings of discontent within both sections, but after 1970 Bjelke-Petersen kept tight control over the parliamentary party, and Sparkes and his management committee dominated the organisation. Often, Bjelke-Petersen and Sparkes worked together in support of shared goals but Sparkes also made frequent attempts to influence or change government policy. This happened either when the government deviated from party policy or when Sparkes felt that Bjelke-Petersen’s extremism was impacting negatively on the party’s chances of winning urban seats. Sometimes Sparkes and the organisation prevailed, but more often than not Bjelke-Petersen relied on the support of the parliamentary party to achieve the outcome he desired. For most of his term in office, Bjelke-Petersen intuitively understood Queensland’s political culture and the political context better than Sparkes.

Originally, the National Party organisation in Queensland had been a low-key organisation, united by shared sectional, social and
political interests. When Bjelke-Petersen succeeded to the premiership, the Country Party, as it then was, was headed by E. F. S Roberts who had succeeded John Ahern, father of Mike, as party president. Before Ahern, the incumbents were Ellis Lawrie and Howard Richter. Sparkes, who already knew Bjelke-Petersen from the latter's early days as an aerial seeding contractor, became president in 1970. One of his first tasks, in a clear case of converging interests, was to quash an attempt to oust Bjelke-Petersen from the premiership. The move against Bjelke-Petersen in October 1970 did not arise suddenly, but in response to a series of events in his first two years as Premier which cast doubt upon his suitability for the role.

Bjelke-Petersen initially had trouble making a successful transition to power. The sure touch which he had shown in communicating with rural Queenslanders over the transport tax eluded him in his attempts to speak with a wider audience. His ascetic lifestyle and opposition to liberalising drinking and gambling laws had given him a 'wowser' image. He was further damaged by rumours of investigations by federal taxation authorities and a claim that he had taken home a copy of the Queen's Birthday Honours list to discuss with his wife. In addition, he faced opposition from conservationists over sand mining at Cooloola, an issue which also provoked his first collision with Sparkes who, in this instance, favoured conservation. Mike Evans remembers 'some pretty bitter clashes':

... several meetings I went to, they were at each other's throats and in the end Bob Sparkes won. Now that relationship ... those behaviour patterns dominated ... from 1970 right through to when Joh finally went. There was always antagonism but it never publicly surfaced until very late in the piece.

This series of incidents fuelled public speculation that business leaders would prefer the more gregarious Gordon Chalk as premier. When Jack Pizzey's previously safe Country Party seat of Isis was lost to Labor in November 1968, Bjelke-Petersen's poor public image was blamed. The Country Party responded by hiring a public relations expert to help him acquire a more urbane image. He was subsequently photographed with racehorses and reported as visiting a pub in
It was clear that he would fight to maintain power, even if it involved compromising some of his long-held beliefs.

In 1969 wowserism was eclipsed as an issue clouding Bjelke-Petersen’s future by controversy over his share holdings. Bjelke-Petersen’s response, to deny any impropriety and refuse to concede an inch, was repeated often throughout his premiership. The first story to surface was over a share transaction when Bjelke-Petersen was a backbencher. As is so often the case with profit-making schemes, the various steps taken appear complex to the financial novice. Conflict of interest is more readily perceived.

In 1959 Bjelke-Petersen’s former partner in oil exploration, Ernie Evans, the then Minister for Mines, had issued him an authority to prospect for petroleum for a fee of £2. The authority was issued with a written warning against trading in such authorities. A month later Bjelke-Petersen incorporated a company, Artesian Basin Oil Co. He entered into an agreement to sell 51 per cent of the shares in Artesian to an American company for £12,650 and to transfer his prospecting authority to them. This was a tidy return on a two pound investment and attracted the attention of the Commissioner for Taxation. Bjelke-Petersen had not believed that the profit formed part of his assessable income for the year, a view not shared by the taxation authorities. Bjelke-Petersen, represented by W.B. Campbell QC, later to become the Queensland Governor who thwarted Bjelke-Petersen’s last-ditch plans to retain the premiership, subsequently lost an appeal in the High Court against the Australian Tax Office’s ruling. Mr Justice Taylor, in dismissing the appeal, said:

There is no doubt that when the appellant made his original application for the authority to prospect, he had not the slightest intention of undertaking personally the expense of exploiting the rights which it conferred … It is about as plain as it could be that it was his intention to secure a substantial reward in some shape or form for his time and trouble and for procuring the issue of the authority.

Despite this setback, Bjelke-Petersen continued his pursuit of entrepreneurial profit. In 1962 Artesian, of which Bjelke-Petersen still owned 49 per cent, was paid £190,000 for the authority to prospect which Bjelke-Petersen had originally bought for two pounds. A large
percentage of the money was used to take up shares in Exoil No Liability, which was chaired by Bill Siller who, three years earlier, had joined Bjelke-Petersen on the board of Artesian. Three weeks after Bjelke-Petersen became premier, Exoil NL and Transoil NL, in which Bjelke-Petersen also held shares, were given six-year leases to prospect for oil on the Great Barrier Reef. Some observers saw Bjelke-Petersen’s interests in oil exploration in the Great Barrier Reef and the Torres Strait as a factor in his opposition to redrawing the border between Queensland and Papua New Guinea so as to give Papua New Guinea control over three small islands near its coast.33

In his public pronouncements, Bjelke-Petersen gave no inkling of understanding that there might be a conflict of interest. According to the individualistic moral values with which he had grown up, he had no doubts about his own probity. He declared to reporters that ‘selling your shares will not make you an honest man’.34 To his worried media adviser:

he was adamant, just adamant that he had nothing to explain. He had shares and that was his right and the thought that he might have to divest or something was completely anathema to him.35

It was sufficient that according to his own lights he was honest. Perhaps many in the Queensland media agreed with him, for their treatment of the issue was low-key. In addition, there was ‘the extraordinary fact that the Premier himself was actually writing a column for the Sunday paper [Hugh Bingham was the real author] which would normally be expected to make the most of it’.36 With restricted media coverage and limited public interest, the Labor Party was unable to make sufficient political capital from the issue to win the 1969 election.

Despite his election success, there was no respite for Bjelke-Petersen. Negative publicity greeted the news that a Bjelke-Petersen family enterprise had been granted state government permission to extend kaolin mining on a family property. This was followed, in early 1970, by the loss in a by-election of the seat of Albert to the Liberals. There were further destabilising attacks on the propriety of Bjelke-Petersen’s premiership, with the disclosure that members of the Bjelke-Petersen cabinet had accepted shares in Comalco, a company
that had direct dealings with the government. Gordon Chalk bought 2,500 shares, Wally Rae took 1,200, Neville Hewitt, Max Hodges and Doug Tooth bought 1,200 and Fred Campbell accepted the comparatively paltry number of 700. Each of these ministers either had, or was about to have, dealings with Comalco in a ministerial capacity. Six senior public servants had also been beneficiaries. Not only was Bjelke-Petersen pursued by the press, but his own party policy was changed to forbid the acceptance of preferential share offers by ministers or members of parliament. Labor criticism was blunted by the fact that Tom Burns had accepted 400 shares on his father's behalf and Jack Egerton had bought the same number for Labor's radio station 4KQ.

In Bjelke-Petersen's words, the issue 'blew over' but his growing unpopularity began to alarm some of his parliamentary colleagues. According to Chalk:

At the time there was fear within C.P. ranks that Petersen was losing ground particularly in provincial city areas such as Ayr, Mackay, Gladstone, Gold Coast etc. Hence, Bird, Camm, Nicholson, Houghton, Hinze, etc. were worried about their own future.

As a consequence, members of this group decided that the Premier should resign. So confident were they of their support for this goal that four representatives, David Nicholson, Jim Houghton, Russell Hinze and Bill Lonergan, warned the Premier that a vote of no confidence would be moved at the next day's parliamentary party meeting if he failed to stand down from the leadership. They told him that a vote of 16 to 10 against him was expected. Bjelke-Petersen's response is well known and, in retrospect, predictable. After his long and patient climb to the top, it was unlikely that he would permit his leadership aspirations to be thwarted so soon. He spent the evening and the following morning on the telephone, canvassing support. He asked Henry McKechnie, whom he was later to elevate to a ministry, to move a vote of confidence. This he won by voting for himself, and by producing a proxy for Neville Hewitt, whom no one had been able to contact. He remained premier but the dissidents were now contemplating a vote of no confidence, probably to have taken place in the Joint Party Room. Gordon Chalk had no doubt that Bjelke-
Petersen would have lost. At this point Bjelke-Petersen called upon Sparkes to intervene and arranged to have him flown from his property to Brisbane by charter pilot Beryl Young, who was later to join the Premier’s staff. Sparkes recalls that there had been ‘general thinking that the job was too big for him, that he ought to perhaps be replaced and I, I must confess, had some reservations myself … I felt there was a question mark over his capacity to do the job properly’.

Sparkes believed, however, that the dissidents had to accept that their first attempt at unseating Belke-Petersen had failed and ‘that you couldn’t keep challenging’. He spoke to senior people in the party who concurred. Any further moves would destabilise the party, so he threatened the rebels with disendorsement and saved Bjelke-Petersen’s political career.

Although Sparkes’ role in preventing a successful ‘coup’ was widely recognised, Bjelke-Petersen’s own acknowledgment was grudging. As the ‘coup’ receded in time, and as the two men’s goals diverged, Bjelke-Petersen’s resentment of Sparkes’ attempts to constrain him grew. In this frame of mind, Bjelke-Petersen minimised Sparkes’ contribution. Derek Townsend, in 1983, refers to Sparkes’ intervention as ‘one of the countless occasions where, according to Joh, Bob has played a key role in management of the Party over many years’. By 1990, when Bjelke-Petersen published his own memoirs, history had been rewritten to the point where Sparkes is depicted as a key player in destabilising the Premier. According to this account, Sparkes had issued a statement saying that the party’s stocks were low and ‘within a few days of his making it, I discovered there was a move within the party to get rid of me, and I have no doubt now it was prompted by Bob Sparkes’ statement’. In response to those who would defend the party president, Bjelke-Petersen reiterates:

I cannot say I felt any gratitude to Sparkes at the time, for I blamed him for creating the leadership crisis in the first place. Someone once said to me, in defence of Sparkes: ‘Joh, don’t forget he rescued you once from an awful mess.’ I replied, ‘Yes, he did rescue me from an awful mess — but it was an awful mess he had created himself by his statement that we were not performing well.’
Bjelke-Petersen’s perception was that the triumphs of the National Party were his alone and that ‘the party organisation consisted of armchair generals who stayed behind the lines, offering advice from time to time. I do not believe they made a fig’s worth of difference to the number of votes we received at elections’. This revision of history is characteristic. His near defeat in the 1970 ‘coup’ was too public and his profile too high to expunge this incident from the public record. Hence he restructured events to cast himself in a more positive light and to shift the blame elsewhere. In the revised account of the attack on his leadership, he claims that ‘I won by two, which meant that I had not needed Nev Hewitt’s proxy after all’. This contradicts all other published accounts which have him scraping home to a tie through the use of his own vote and Hewitt’s. If he had not done that, he would have joined the ranks of leaders like Hughes in 1916, Menzies in 1941 and Gorton in 1971 who had been brought down by lack of party room support. This brush with failure did not deter him, but rather made him realise that he must cultivate loyalty within the parliamentary party and the ministry. It also made him reluctant to trust anyone outside of his family and staff, leading eventually to the point where he accepted advice only from this close group, to the detriment of his political survival. What he could never acknowledge was the importance of Sparkes to his political survival and hence to his success.

Integral to that survival was the future of the Country Party itself. Although the Party was strong in Queensland, it was apparent to Sparkes that a rural oriented party was an anachronism in a modern, developed state. It was central to his vision that the Party develop a wider base and draw upon urban support. He was joined in implementing this vision and in managing the Party’s electoral campaigns by Mike Evans who, in 1970, had replaced Colonel Neville Hatton as State Secretary of the National Party. Evans was a Brisbane school teacher with a BA who saw himself as ‘an academic so to speak, with a degree’. His urban background and education were portents of future directions, even if old-time members of the party could not see it. Evans tells the story that upon his appointment he had ‘M. G. Evans, B.A. (Qld)’ printed on his Party stationery ‘until some of the old blokes said “what is all this bulldust about?” so I took it off’.
Evans provoked Bjelke-Petersen’s wrath when, in 1985, a year after his resignation as State Secretary, he argued publicly for ‘coalition as the most desirable form of conservative government for Queensland’. Allen Callaghan’s opinion is that Evans provided a counterbalance to Sparkes and Bjelke-Petersen, and that when Evans went there was nobody to provide this role. He draws a parallel with the Premier’s office triumvirate of himself, Stan Wilcox and Beryl Young.

The first strategy to widen the party’s base, proposed in a confidential document in 1973, was amalgamation with the Democratic Labor Party (DLP). This mirrored a proposal at the federal level which had prompted Gough Whitlam to observe, ‘I have heard rumours about an impending union, but considering the parents it is likely to be barren.’ Liberal Party suspicions of the proposed merger, and the DLP’s plummeting electoral fortunes, meant that no formal union eventuated, but when the DLP wound up in 1974 its last state secretary urged its members to join the Nationals. Sparkes estimates that 80 per cent of DLP members joined the Nationals, and DLP voters were encouraged to support the Nationals whenever the opportunity arose.

With the immediate objective of attracting urban voters and the longer term goal of government in its own right, the Country Party’s name was changed to ‘National Party’ in 1974. Sparkes felt that the ‘country’ label gave the impression of a rustic organisation and was turning people away. Reactions to possible names were researched by W. D. Scott and Co. The possibilities included the Australian Conservative Party, the Democratic Party of Australia, the National Democratic Party, the Centre Party, the New Australian Country Universal Party, the Australian Democratic Centre Party, the Big Country Party and the Decentralisation Party. Sparkes believed that the party should project itself as ‘a truly national party with a stable middle-of-the-road philosophy’. Bjelke-Petersen’s reply to this proposition was to ask: ‘You know what happens to people who walk down the middle of the road?’ Nevertheless, despite his misgivings about a shift towards the political centre, he threw his support behind the name change and Sparkes’ expansionary ideas. The year before, at the Party’s annual conference, the name change had been endorsed
by 621 votes to 22. According to Mike Evans, a lot of the groundwork had been done before the conference so that when the vote was taken ‘all the work had been done’. The Country Party was re-launched as the National Party in Brisbane, in an event which won the annual Public Relations Industry Award:

... we launched it with great fanfare and razzamatazz, beautiful girls. Joh was all part of that ... it demonstrates the nature of the man, how he could be so pliable and accept all these things ... he went on touring up the coast with bands, all around Queensland so that really cemented the new name and image and policies at that time and he was all part of it ... this tension that was there was very, very much concealed and it only came up on the odd occasion but underneath it all, it was there.

The move into urban areas brought the National Party into direct conflict with the Liberals. One close observer suggests that, for many Liberal supporters, at this point the coalition died.

Negotiations with the DLP had given National Party officials an insight into the former’s use of policy sub-committees. Under Evans and Sparkes, the number of National Party policy sub-committees expanded from two which dealt with probate and lands to twenty-six, appointed by State Conference or Central Council. The committees were chaired by party members but ‘outside experts’ were invited to participate in order to help overcome the perception that the National Party was still a narrow-minded, rural party. Many of these experts were Liberal Party members so the Nationals achieved two things: competent advice and a shift in personal allegiance. Before the annual conference, the party secretariat would invite each committee to formulate policy to be presented first to Central Council and then to State Conference, where, if passed, it would be endorsed as formal party policy. According to Ken Meissner, a National Party Federal Divisional President from 1983 to 1987 and member of various policy committees, policy emanating from the committees was of variable quality. A minority of committee members was well informed, but others either pushed their own barrow or had minimal levels of education. This meant that the policy-making function of the committees was ‘hit and miss ... professional bureaucrats could run rings around them’. The Cribb Report provides support for
this assessment, finding that although by 1989 there were 32 committees ‘only 13 reached a satisfactory level’.72

Other strategies were more consistently successful. With the assistance of senior vice-president, Charles Holm, Sparkes and Evans worked further to reinvigorate the party organisation which was perceived by senior members of the organisation as a war machine dedicated to the support of the political ‘war horse’, Bjelke-Petersen.73 Sparkes advocated a wider role for the Young Nationals and instituted regular attitude surveys of young people.74 Market research was also used to survey opinion in critical seats, and in non-traditional seats that had been identified as potential National Party successes, the plebiscite system was abandoned in favour of hand-picking well-known community figures who were prepared to join the Party and contest elections. These candidates had very different profiles from the traditional farmer/grazier candidate. They were younger, better educated, and from a wide range of occupations.75 The strategy was rewarded in the 1974 State election when the Party won 39 seats, including the metropolitan seat of Wynnum and the urban seat of Ipswich West. The party lost these seats to Labor in 1977, but consolidated its position in a number of important provincial seats. Six years later, in 1983, the Nationals were able to govern in their own right with the aid of two defectors from the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party State President, John Moore, who had attended the Southport School with Sparkes, acknowledged that ‘one of the great strengths of the National Party is its complete dedication to a purpose. It is a disciplined party and has single-mindedness in achieving its purpose. Bob [Sparkes] epitomises that point of view’.76

The National Party in Queensland during the Bjelke-Petersen era was a ‘democracy tempered by varying degrees of paternal authoritarianism’.77 According to the formal structure of the organisation, party policy, which was not binding on the parliamentary party, was formulated at annual conferences attended by about 800 delegates. Less important policy was dealt with by the 210-member Central Council which met at least three times a year. In this context, the iron law of oligarchy prevailed and power within the organisation lay with the executive and the State Management Committee, a body of 41 members comprising the party president, the Premier and his deputy,
the Treasurer and assistant, other senior party administrators, and the three party trustees. The latter were elder statesmen whose formal role was to protect the integrity of funds. Less formally, they were "fundraisers with sufficient status to go to big business".78

In Evans' opinion, the Management Committee under Sparkes was 'just as bad' as the 'faceless men' of the Labor Party. He recalls that 'Bob wanted to interfere with ... the Government's workings' and that the gulf between the party organisation and the parliamentary wing widened 'because of Bob's dictatorship'.79 Sparkes denies such charges in a qualified fashion: 'I have never been a dictator to the extent that I have refused to accept majority decisions ... even though that has been damn difficult at times.'80 As with Bjelke-Petersen, he liked to get his own way and clashes were common, although the tension between them was concealed from public view. Evans remembers 'a meeting of the management committee in Rockhampton ... it might have been 1977, 1979 ... where Joh walked out angrily, just walked out and said "Bob you are a dictator".'81 Nonetheless, Sparkes was a 'master craftsman at getting decisions through. He made everyone feel as if they'd won'.82 An observer of Sparkes in operation at a Wambo Shire Council meeting noted his skill and technique:

He grasped the essentials of the dispute quickly. It is something he prides himself on, the capacity to master detail. But don't ask him about it in a month's time. His mind processes rather than retains.

For the next two hours of the council meeting, he listened, reasoned and probed.83

As might be anticipated, Sparkes also dominated State Conferences, although frequently he shared the limelight with Bjelke-Petersen. In 1990 members of the Party complained to Margaret Cribb (an academic who had been asked by the National Party to prepare a report on the Party in Queensland) that debate was 'choked off' and that participants never knew the outcome of resolutions brought forward but not dealt with at the time.84 According to Cribb, Sparkes sometimes gavelled through policies favoured by the Party hierarchy against opposition from delegates, and Bjelke-Petersen 'was capable of authoritarian intrusion into the debate'.85 Evans, however, portrays
Sparkes as the authoritarian of the pair: 'Joh Petersen is not authoritarian. Joh Petersen is a gentleman ... Joh was populist. He wasn’t authoritarian.' Populism and authoritarianism, though, are far from being mutually exclusive, nor does authoritarianism necessarily preclude courteous and inclusive behaviour towards those of one’s group. At the heart of authoritarianism lies the worship of power, the rejection of ambiguity and the repulsion of outsider groups, all characteristics that Bjelke-Petersen repeatedly demonstrated throughout his career.

Part of Sparkes’ strategy involved placing the Party on a sound financial footing to enable the funding of assaults on metropolitan seats. In 1978 each state parliamentary member was asked to contribute $200 to the party coffers to fund research. More significantly, the Bjelke-Petersen Foundation was established in the following year with the aim of raising $2.5 million for the Party. The Foundation was the idea of Everald Compton, an accountant and consultant approached by the National Party for advice on fund-raising. The setting up of the Foundation was a clear illustration of Sparkes and Bjelke-Petersen operating symbiotically. Without Sparkes’ attention to long-term financial and organisational planning, Bjelke-Petersen’s position would have been less secure. By the same token, the Party benefited from Bjelke-Petersen’s personal popularity which Compton recognised as vital to the Party’s electoral success:

... there were many people in Queensland who were willing to support Joh Bjelke-Petersen as Premier, who were not willing to support the National Party. Their support of the Premier was based on their belief that he was responsible for the extraordinary economic prosperity of Queensland. They believed that if the Premier departed from the scene, that prosperity would wane ... I recommended that any major appeal for capital funds should be based around the name of the Premier as the Party’s most promotable product.

The income from the Foundation was designed to supplement earnings from membership dues, fund-raising activities and donations. As the senior partner in the Coalition, with ministers holding strategic portfolios such as Commerce and Industry, Mines and Energy, Lands and Tourism, the Party already attracted support from
entrepreneurs and developers. Donors to the Foundation were offered recognition of their generosity, ranging from having buildings named after them for a donation of $100,000, to a private dinner with the Premier for $10,000. It was anticipated that funds for the Foundation would also come from the purchase of buildings in regional centres, to be used both as Party offices and rental properties. The Party established its headquarters at Bjelke-Petersen House, a property bought by the Foundation in one of Brisbane’s inner suburbs, Spring Hill.

It was not long, however, before allegations of bribery, corruption and cronyism surfaced, with the Labor Party claiming that government contracts were being awarded to Foundation subscribers. The allegations continued throughout Bjelke-Petersen’s premiership and it soon became apparent that support for the National Party was essential to business success. Two Liberal backbenchers alleged in Parliament that donations to the Foundation could bring about favourable government decisions, naming the minister responsible for land rezoning, Russell Hinze. The Opposition Leader, Ed Casey, joined them in allegations that a donation of $100,000 by the Bexley Corporation which wanted to build a shopping complex had achieved the rezoning of land to a ‘retail’ category, against the recommendation of the Gold Coast City Council. The allegations were never adequately substantiated, but public misgiving lingered, especially when questions were asked about the awarding of the Port of Brisbane contract and the granting of a knighthood to businessman Justin Hickey, who confirmed that, at the Premier’s request, he had donated $100,000 towards the construction of a hospice in Kingaroy. Sir Justin made it clear that he had paid the money before receiving the knighthood. It was later revealed that the Premier had personally approached the Maroochy Shire Council regarding a rezoning application by Sir Justin’s company, Kabascel Pty Ltd, but that this intervention had been unsuccessful. Some time later, the Local Government Minister, Russell Hinze, threatened to sack the council because it was ‘anti-development’. Hinze himself told the Fitzgerald Inquiry that he was warned by Sir Robert Sparkes ‘to donate to the fund or he would not “get anywhere in Queensland politics”’. The Fitzgerald Inquiry, although indicating that no con-
elusions of impropriety had been drawn, noted instances whereby cabinet overruled the normal tendering process and awarded contracts for public works to substantial donors to the National Party. In 1986 it was revealed that the Queensland Government had overruled the Rural Reconstruction Board and the Agricultural Bank and directed the latter to lend money to the National Party’s Northern Director.

Bjelke-Petersen’s private affairs were not immune from suspicion. A trustee company for the Bjelke-Petersen family, Ciasom Pty Ltd, approached the Singapore-based European Asian Bank for a loan to provide working capital for a property owned by Ciasom and managed by the Premier’s son, John. Following a meeting with the Premier, the bank’s Sydney representative wrote to his superiors:

For a proper assessment of this request, the information available at this time is rather limited, but we think we have to go along as this would open up 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 …

A version of this story which referred to Bjelke-Petersen’s attempts to raise a loan in Japan featured on Channel 9’s ‘Today Tonight’ program in February 1983. Bjelke-Petersen sued but Channel 9 did not expect the writ to proceed. When, two years later, Alan Bond purchased Channel 9, the writ still lay dormant. Bjelke-Petersen claimed $1 million from Bond who negotiated the amount down to $400,000 in an out-of-court settlement. This was still at least ten times greater than the amount that would normally apply. Bond subsequently told Jana Wendt on ‘A Current Affair’ that ‘the Premier made it under no doubt that if we were to continue to do business in Queensland then he expected the matter to be resolved’. In 1989 the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal found the arrangement, and Bjelke-Petersen’s attempts to conceal the payment, ‘improper’. In 1991 a jury found that Sir Leslie Thiess had bribed Bjelke-Petersen on a large scale and on a number of occasions. The bribes amounted to about $1 million worth of gifts, including a hangar, a D9 bulldozer, truck repairs and a generator. Bjelke-Petersen proclaimed his
innocence and threatened those who had wronged him with divine retribution.105

As for the Bjelke-Petersen Foundation, suspicions had already been fuelled by revelations that Sir Robert Sparkes had written to businesses suggesting that donations to the Foundation were a ‘very essential investment’, that the names of those declining to donate were kept on file and that government ministers were asking companies for donations.106 Bjelke-Petersen was reported as saying, ‘... all sensible people give to the National Party’, adding, ‘You can quote me on that. People know a good government when they see it and they know it will provide.’107 The Labor Party further added to the flow of allegations by asserting that Sir Thomas Covacevich, a Cairns solicitor who had been appointed as one of three members of the 1985–86 Redistribution Commission, had previously sought funds for the Bjelke-Petersen Foundation.108 That there was genuine concern in the business community about the extent of cronyism was confirmed by National Party trustee Sir Roderick Proctor, who alleged that ‘it was fairly obvious that this [calling tenders] was only a charade and that it had already been decided who was going to be granted the contract’.109 Following such public criticism, it was said by several Brisbane businessmen that Sir Roderick’s own business ventures were out of favour with the government.110 At no time was Bjelke-Petersen prepared to concede impropriety. When Liberal leader Llew Edwards had tried to introduce a code of ethics requiring, among other things, that ministers divest themselves of company directorships, Bjelke-Petersen, true to the individualistic Protestant ethic in which he had been raised, declared that ‘no code written or otherwise, can make any man honest if he has not lived that way all his life’.111

Notes
10. The biographical information in this section is extracted from McGregor, op. cit.
21. ibid.
29. ibid., p. 74.

32. Quoted in *Canberra Survey*, vol. 29, no. 11, 19 November 1976.


34. Lunn, op. cit., pp. 75–76.


39. Lunn, op. cit., p. 78.


42. Quoted in Hazlehurst, op. cit., p. 251.

43. ibid.


45. ibid.

46. Townsend, op. cit., p. 266.


48. ibid., p. 97.

49. ibid., p. 201.


55. ibid.


60. ibid.

61. Metcalfe, op. cit., p. 56.
62. ibid., p. 34.
63. ibid.
64. Evans, pers. comm., April 1997.
65. ibid.
68. Metcalfe, op. cit., p. 36.
71. ibid.
74. Metcalfe, op. cit., p. 37.
75. Cribb, 'Queensland', pp. 72–73.
77. Cribb, 'Queensland', p. 75. Unless otherwise acknowledged, information on the Party organisation and structure comes from this source.
83. McGregor, op. cit.
84. Cribb, Report, p. 17.
85. Cribb, 'Queensland', p. 76.
86. Evans, pers. comm., April 1977.
88. Charlton, op. cit., p. 205.
90. Charlton, p. 207.
93. ibid.

97. Charlton, op cit., p. 211.


100. Quoted in Whitton, op. cit., p. 79.

101. ibid., p. 172.

102. ibid.


110. ibid.

BJELKE-PETERSEN's relations with Sparkes began seriously to deteriorate prior to the 1986 election. At this time donations of close to a million dollars began to be channelled through Kaldeal Pty Ltd, a private company whose directors were Bill Roberts, chairman of both the Murgon Shire Council and Bjelke-Petersen’s electorate council, and Sir Edward Lyons.1 Lyons was reputed to have been close to Bjelke-Petersen from 1975, having achieved this proximity by the simple expedient of writing the Premier flattering letters and waiting outside his office until summoned.2 He was knighted for services to finance and commerce in 1978, became a National Party trustee in the same year, and assumed the role of personal investment adviser to the Premier. His fund-raising capacities brought him power and his influence eventually eclipsed Sparkes’ despite the embarrassment he caused the Bjelke-Petersen government. In 1981 Lyons, detained by the police for an alleged drink-driving offence, was neither charged nor arrested owing to the direct intervention of another Bjelke-Petersen crony, Sir Terence Lewis. Lyons was eventually charged on summons after the intervention of another police officer. The incident provoked the Bar Association of Queensland and the Council for Civil Liberties to press for an inquiry, but Russell Hinze, the Minister for Main Roads, Local Government, Police and Racing, refused. In 1985 Lyons was forced to resign as TAB chairman and National Party trustee and from his post on the Channel 9 board which he had been offered by Alan Bond. Lyons, had, against the rules, spent $300,000 in credit betting. Liberal ministers had opposed his
appointment as TAB chairman, refusing to sign the Governor's minute, but Sir James Ramsey had approved it despite the lack of traditional cabinet unanimity.\(^3\)

Kaldeal was set up after the deterioration in relations between Bjelke-Petersen and Sparkes. There were no public intimations at this time that Bjelke-Petersen intended to seek election to the Commonwealth parliament or that funds raised by Kaldeal were part of a federal election war chest. If this had been the case, non-disclosure of donors may have constituted a breach of Commonwealth electoral legislation.\(^4\) In 1987, Lyons said, Kaldeal contributed $12,000 to a campaign to oust Sparkes as party president.\(^5\) Sir Robert testified that he had only become aware of Kaldeal through a donor. Kaldeal had paid $300,000 for television advertising during the 1986 election campaign. Donors to Kaldeal such as Citra Constuctions and Electric Power Transnussions were awarded government contracts, although Bjelke-Petersen denied any connection between donations and government decisions.\(^6\) Other donations remained anonymous and were made in cash. According to Sir Robert Sparkes, there was nothing sinister in this. Rather, donors were afraid that they would be declared 'black' by trade unions if they were found to be donating to the Coalition.\(^7\) One $200,000 donation, by Singapore businessman Robert Sng, led eventually to charges of perjury against Bjelke-Petersen. The Crown alleged that Bjelke-Petersen had lied to the Fitzgerald Inquiry either to cover his role in fundraising or to hide a connection between the donation and an application by Sng's company, Historic Holdings, to develop the Port Office site in Brisbane. Cabinet had selected Historic Holdings although a committee advising cabinet had ranked Historic Holdings third.\(^8\) The jury in the 1991 perjury trial was split 10-2 with the majority believing him guilty. The result was a deadlock, with the jury foreman, Luke Shaw, a member of the Young Nationals, dismissing the general consensus of jury members. Special prosecutor Doug Drummond ruled against a retrial on the grounds of Bjelke-Petersen's age and the difficulty of getting overseas witnesses to Brisbane again. Florence Bjelke-Petersen saw the 'hand of God working in Joh's courtcase with Luke Shaw being there at exactly the right time'.\(^9\)

In strategies designed to strengthen the National Party organis-
tionally, Sparkes and his colleagues had a relatively free rein. He also had considerable success at branch level, keeping National Party members quiescent with threats of disendorsement and ensuring that candidates favoured by him were preselected. For example, he had former Liberal Brian Austin nominated for the seat of Nicklin and Huan Fraser similarly preselected for Springwood after other candidates had been endorsed.¹⁰

Sparkes’ intervention in matters of policy was, however, a different matter. His motives in this arena were twofold. He preferred National Party parliamentarians to assume delegate status, and he believed that the transition from Country to National entailed liberalisation of the Party’s image. His success was mixed, especially in attempts to moderate the most extreme of Bjelke-Petersen’s utterances. In any case, Sparkes appears to have worried unnecessarily about the impact of the Premier’s more extreme views. Far from alienating support, Bjelke-Petersen’s term in office appears to have been sustained by his outrageous statements, support for charlatans, and authoritarian style.¹¹ Sparkes’ opposition to Bjelke-Petersen may, however, have reassured some voters, especially supporters of the Liberal Party, that moderating influences were at work in the Coalition. Nevertheless, an examination of a series of strategic issues on which Sparkes tackled Bjelke-Petersen shows that, on most occasions, the latter’s view prevailed. So long as Bjelke-Petersen continued to lead an electorally successful government he had the upper hand and was able to resist the threat to his autonomy which Sparkes’ intervention represented.

Before analysing a range of policies over which Sparkes and Bjelke-Petersen disagreed, it must be acknowledged that Sparkes was neither consistently liberal nor consistently opposed to Bjelke-Petersen. Both were at home in the National Party and, as might be expected, their beliefs, as well as their political interests, often converged. They shared the major goal of defeating ‘socialism’ in any of its manifestations, especially the ALP. Sparkes, like Bjelke-Petersen, demonstrated little real concern about the erosion of civil liberties in Queensland or the disregard for parliamentary practice and tradition. He failed to acknowledge the right to strike, suggesting in 1982 that the state government establish a military-style organisation to intervene in strikes in the power industry.¹² He was opposed to street
marches and believed demonstrations to be the antithesis of democracy. His criticism of pastoral industry awards handed down in the State Industrial Court by Commissioner Pont, a former AWU organiser, provoked the government into announcing that it would appoint a sixth industrial commissioner to decide which cases would come before each commissioner. When matters impinged upon his own stake in the pastoral industry, Sparkes appeared to be as unconcerned by considerations of the separation of powers as was Bjelke-Petersen.

On occasion, he publicly endorsed the Bjelke-Petersen leadership style: ‘Even though Joh is often controversial, I say — thank God for his strong, honest, purposeful leadership in these turbulent times.’ He supported Bjelke-Petersen when there were moves by a number of National Party backbenchers, early in 1983, to revert to the situation whereby ministers were elected by the parliamentary party. He also made it clear that he would brook no challenges to Bjelke-Petersen’s leadership and shared Bjelke-Petersen’s delight in the Nationals’ governing in their own right after the 1983 split with the Liberals.

Despite such appearances of harmony, the two disagreed often, although acrimony was usually hidden from the public gaze. An examination of issues over which they differed gives an insight into their priorities and the balance of power between them. Generally, Sparkes took a more considered view, weighing the issue of the day against the party’s strategic direction. He acknowledged that in order to ‘secure the support of a significant proportion of the middle-of-the-road people … we must get rid of our propaganda-created ultra conservative and fascist image’. He was concerned by the influence of the League of Rights within the party, their backing of the Premier, and the Premier’s apparent leanings in their direction. Bjelke-Petersen had no such anxiety. His inclination was to trust his instincts and shoot from the hip. Until his last term he rarely misjudged what he could get away with.

An awkward compromise was agreed to by the parliamentary and organisational wings of the party over the 1977 referenda questions concerning casual senate vacancies and votes for Territorians in referenda. Sparkes sided with Malcolm Fraser and Doug Anthony and
The Bjelke-Petersen family. Front row, left to right: Agneta, George, Johannes. Back row: family friend, Christian, Maren. (Queensland Newspapers)

A young Joh Bjelke-Petersen. (Queensland Newspapers)
Christian, who died in 1929 aged 22, and Joh Bjelke-Petersen. (Queensland Newspapers)
Joh Bjelke-Petersen with his mother, ‘a bright and steady beacon’. (Queensland Newspapers)

(The Queensland Newspapers)

The first day of the ‘Joh era’, 8 August 1968. (Queensland Newspapers)
The Premier speaks to the press after surviving the 1970 ‘coup’. (Queensland Newspapers)
‘God had sent him.’ The Premier reads the lesson at the Lutheran Church in Woolloongabba, February 1972. (Queensland Newspapers)

Florence Bjelke-Petersen and the modest family home at Bethany near Kingaroy in 1973. (Queensland Newspapers)

The Queensland cabinet granted police one week’s extra leave in the wake of the Springboks’ Brisbane visit. (Queensland Newspapers)
'The games put me on the map.' Bjelke-Petersen declared a state of emergency during the Springbok rugby union tour in 1973. (Queensland Newspapers)
With Labor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam (centre) who Bjelke-Petersen likened to a 'feudal lord'. Deputy premier and Liberal leader Gordon Chalk (right) was willing to work with the federal government, but Bjelke-Petersen attacked its 'communist-inspired' policies at every opportunity. (Queensland Newspapers)
The Premier with his Party's federal leader Doug Anthony and the National Party singers. The Country Party was re-labelled as the National Party in 1974 with the aim of widening the party's base. *(Queensland Newspapers)*

Celebratory drinks in 1978 for the Premier's pilot, Beryl Young, private secretary Stan Wilcox, senior public servant Keith Spann, who predicted Bjelke-Petersen's rise from Works and Housing Minister, and news and information officer, Allan Callaghan. *(Queensland Newspapers)*
The lovely old Belle-Vue Hotel opposite Parliament House in Brisbane. (Queensland Newspapers)

Thirteen Liberal backbenchers supported a Labor motion condemning the late-night destruction of the Belle-Vue, ordered by Bjelke-Petersen in 1979. (Queensland Newspapers)
With cancer therapist Milan Brych. Bjelke-Petersen was susceptible to the appeal of charlatans. *(Queensland Newspapers)*

With pilot Beryl Young. Young had the same attributes as his mother. *(Queensland Newspapers)*

Bjelke-Petersen with 'Queensland’s other strong man', Sir Robert Sparkes, at the opening of new party headquarters in Spring Hill Brisbane in 1979. *(Queensland Newspapers)*
With deputy, Bill Gunn, in 1982. Gunn initiated the Fitzgerald Inquiry into corruption in Queensland. (Queensland Newspapers)
A winner again. The premier on election night, 1980. (Queensland Newspapers)

'We have a very good police force.' Police Commissioner Terry Lewis was sentenced to 14 years jail after being found guilty of official corruption. (Queensland Newspapers)

Bjelke-Petersen, who believed you could learn more in fifteen years of living in a cow bail than at Oxford University, was awarded an honorary doctorate of laws from the University of Queensland. (Queensland Newspapers)
Appointing 'Wally' Campbell as Governor was Bjelke-Petersen's only regret. (Queensland Newspapers)

Announcing his resignation after 19 years as premier. (Queensland Newspapers)
With Russ Hinze in 1988. Hinze died before he could face eight counts of official corruption. (Queensland Newspapers)

Florence Bjelke-Petersen saw the ‘hand of God working’ in the presence of Young National Luke Shaw as jury foreman in the former premier’s trial for perjury. (Queensland Newspapers)
Bjelke-Petersen and Florence after the jury failed to reach a verdict in his 1991 trial for perjury. (Queensland Newspapers)
advocated a 'yes' vote. Bjelke-Petersen opposed the proposals. The Central Council of the Party passed a motion recognising the rights of the organisational and parliamentary wings to differ, but the relationship between Sparkes and Bjelke-Petersen continued to deteriorate:

Throughout this period, the Premier continued to attend State Management Committee meetings, but at times you could cut the air with a knife. It was obvious that the Premier believed very deeply that there was a need for the top echelons of the party to realign themselves in his direction.20

Sparkes, however, withstood such pressure and continued to disagree with the Premier on a series of issues. Typical were sex education in schools and the demolition of the Belle-Vue Hotel. Sparkes warned that hard-line views on both issues were counter-productive to a party hoping to win city seats.21 At the party's 1979 conference, in a speech in favour of sex education, Sparkes pleaded with members, 'if you want to survive in the future, for God's sake, don't condemn us in the eyes of the people and the nation as a party dominated by narrow-minded, puritanical wowsers'.22 Bjelke-Petersen's government, however, rejected the recommendation of the parliamentary select committee on education, chaired by Mike Ahern, that sex education be introduced into Queensland schools. Bjelke-Petersen's motive in appointing Ahern may have been to keep him busy and thus out of the way.23 As a countervailing influence, he also appointed former primary school teacher Lin Powell to the committee, 'put there to sabotage both its work and Ahern personally'.24 The Premier urged Powell to bring down a minority report, thus providing him with the excuse to reject the committee's recommendations.25

Abortion was another issue on which Sparkes and Bjelke-Petersen differed. In 1980 the Bjelke-Petersen government proposed legislation banning abortion in all but limited circumstances. Sparkes branded the bill discriminatory and unworkable and called on National Party parliamentarians to oppose it.26 On this issue Sparkes was successful. The Liberal and Labor parties adhered to the traditional policy of a conscience vote. Bjelke-Petersen suggested abstention as the appropriate course of action for National Party members.
who could not support the legislation, but it was defeated, 40–35, with four Nationals opposing it. Five years later Sparkes again intervened successfully when police confiscated thousands of case records from fertility clinics in Brisbane and Townsville. Faced with a public outcry, Sparkes urged the government to see that the files were returned.

A loss for Bjelke-Petersen in this era was unusual but, on an issue of conscience, not critical to his continued domination. It was far more important to him that his wishes be followed on the matter of the endorsement of Florence Bjelke-Petersen as a National Party Senate candidate in 1980. The Nationals were placed in this situation by the Liberals’ determination to run a separate Senate ticket, thus breaking a longstanding arrangement. The State President of the Liberal Party, Yvonne McComb, was placed second, after Neville Bonner, in the belief that she could win one of the seats held by National senators Ron Maunsell and Dr Glenister Sheil. Sparkes had reservations about the proposal to stand Florence Bjelke-Petersen because her ‘Snake Valley style’ was incompatible with the Party’s new, more worldly, image and direction. Her supporters felt, however, that apart from the Premier himself she was the highest profile candidate they could find. A private survey had indicated that she had a recognition rating of 90 per cent compared with 10 per cent for the Party’s Ron Maunsell. The Nationals, in Sparkes’ absence (he was attending his investiture in London), dropped Maunsell to the number three position in favour of Florence Bjelke-Petersen at number one. Bjelke-Petersen credits his friend, confidant and National Party trustee, Sir Edward Lyons, with achieving this result but he may have underestimated his own contribution. Reports at the time ‘asserted that the premier had thrown his considerable weight, actively and threateningly, behind his wife and was the instigator of the dropping of Senator Maunsell’.

Bjelke-Petersen’s instincts proved correct. Florence Bjelke-Petersen was an electoral winner, increasing the Party’s vote from the order of 25–26 per cent to 33–34 per cent, with much of the gain in the metropolitan region. Her success cost Sheil his Senate seat. Sheil had been appointed by Malcolm Fraser as Minister for Veterans’ Affairs in 1977, only to lose the position swiftly because of his support for
apartheid. His Senate term was not due to finish until the end of June 1981, but, having already lost the seat, he resigned four months early in order to contest the by-election for the federal seat of McPherson. This had been made necessary by the unexpected death of the sitting Liberal member, Eric Robinson. Sheil’s early departure created a casual Senate vacancy which Bjelke-Petersen wanted his wife to fill. This would entitle her to an additional superannuation benefit of $150,000 at the end of the six-year term, and cost Sheil $80,000 in lost payments. When Sheil failed to win McPherson against the Liberal candidate, Peter White, pressure was applied within the National Party to appoint Sheil to the casual vacancy, but in defiance of the Party organisation Bjelke-Petersen successfully nominated his wife.34

Sparkes’s battles with residual ‘Snake-Valley’ elements in the parliamentary party were not, however, over. In mid-1982 Vic Sullivan, the Deputy Premier, and Ken Tomkins, the Minister for Aboriginal and Island Affairs, in the company of backbench parliamentarians, senior public servants and Sir Edward Lyons, were filmed fishing from the government vessel, the Melbidir, while ostensibly on a fact-finding tour of the Torres Strait. Bjelke-Petersen was slow to act. Sparkes urged an immediate cabinet reshuffle, seeing an opportunity to select younger ministers, but Bjelke-Petersen prevaricated. He had never yet dismissed a minister, a circumstance which Margaret Cribb attributes to his ‘obdurate loyalty to old friends and colleagues’.35 It was also important to him to maintain the loyalty of his cabinet, and this, combined with Sir Edward Lyon’s involvement, may have been a consideration. Eventually Sullivan and Tomkins resigned, but not before Tomkins had given a number of embarrassing interviews in which he demonstrated ignorance of his portfolio and a rather cavalier approach to the responsibilities of a minister. In an interview with Radio New Zealand he said: ‘Aborigines are not advanced enough to own freehold land. They catch birds and fish and goannas and that sort of thing …’ He also told the media that he had become a politician ‘to have fun … I have had my fun and now it is getting a bit hard’.36 Both men blamed Sparkes and the Party organisation for their downfall, accusing them of ‘treachery, cowardice, disloyalty and duplicity’.37
During 1982 conflict between Sparkes and Bjelke-Petersen persisted, with the Premier retaining the upper hand. An important illustration concerned their difference of opinion over Aboriginal land rights. Bjelke-Petersen’s variety of Christianity had not equipped him to understand Aboriginal spirituality and its relationship with the land. To him, it was hypocrisy on the part of a Christian nation ‘to preserve all the rituals and spirit of the Goanna and all the rest of it that they had in earlier days’. In 1982, in a move widely believed to be a ploy designed to prevent federal intervention, the Queensland government moved to abolish Aboriginal and Islander community reserves and to give title to the reserve lands to local councils elected by the communities. The titles were vested in the councils under a ‘deed of grant in trust’ which meant that the title could be revoked by the government for unspecified reasons. Sparkes argued that the legislation should be more specific regarding the nature of any transgressions that could lead to revocation of the deeds. His opinion was shared by church leaders (especially in the Uniting Church which was responsible for Aurukun and Mornington Island) and the Commonwealth government, which insisted that security of tenure should be provided. Bjelke-Petersen, however, rejected such reasoning as irrelevant to the principal issue, which was not land rights but defence and security, both of which were being compromised by a communist plot to create a separate black nation in Australia. In support of this view, he had, the year before, cited a letter from Lady Cilento in which she indicated that her husband, Sir Raphael, had learned from undercover associates that the communists had long-range plans to alienate Aboriginal lands. She congratulated Bjelke-Petersen on his ‘political understanding of the situation’ and reminded him that ‘the Russians are not the best chess players in the world for nothing!’ In the face of such eccentric scaremongering, Bjelke-Petersen could be sure of public apathy, if not latent support.

Even on issues provoking wider interest and greater opposition within his own party, his opinions usually prevailed. It was apparent that opposition was becoming intolerable to him and that alternative positions were, increasingly, to be disregarded. One such issue was the proposed register of foreign land ownership. In the absence of the Premier on an overseas trip, cabinet approved draft legislation, which
Sparkes also supported. At the 1983 National Party State Conference Sparkes and Bjelke-Petersen clashed heatedly on this question. Although Sparkes was backed by a majority of the delegates, Bjelke-Petersen persisted, telling journalists that the proposed land register 'was not going anywhere. It is sitting still. Do you reckon that finishes it? There are more ways of skinning a cat than that'.

Such confidence that his own view would prevail, despite procedural constraints emanating from the organisation, was only enhanced by the Nationals’ success in the 1983 state election. The irritant of a coalition partner, albeit for the most part a compliant one, had been removed. Bjelke-Petersen finally acquired the Treasury portfolio as well as the premiership. Although superficially this was a further enhancement of his power, his lack of ease with economic debate and a deterioration in the state’s economic condition provoked considerable criticism. Further, his dislike of Sparkes pushed him closer to Lyons and other admirers. He became increasingly intemperate and questions began to be asked about his political astuteness.

The very success that he and Sparkes had both desired and worked towards sowed the seeds of his eventual downfall:

Victory, in short, did not bring humility but hubris ... the dangerous reality was the ever increasing marginalisation of Sparkes as the circle around the Premier tightened ... [its members] urging their varied and personally ambitious political agendas. Bjelke-Petersen now believed he did not need Sparkes' skill and political wisdom, forged over years of political experience.

The clash of interests between the new court and the old was clearly visible when, in 1986, Bjelke-Petersen suffered a public and humiliating defeat by Sparkes over the Lindeman Island affair. In retrospect this appears to be pivotal, not only in Bjelke-Petersen's relationship with Sparkes but in his political judgment and the quality of advice he was heeding. The main issue was the Queensland government's agreement to permit East-West Airlines to develop a resort on the island's national park land, with the prospect that, eventually, freehold would be granted if certain conditions were met. At the head of East-West's Queensland operations was Bjelke-Petersen's old friend and confidant, Sir Edward Lyons.
Opposition to the Lindeman Island proposal was vocal and widespread and precipitated concern that the Nationals might suffer electorally in urban seats. Sparkes and vice-president Charles Holm expressed their ‘grave concern’ and recommended that the matter be considered by the party’s State Management Committee and Central Council.45 Ken Meissner recalls that in the Party’s metropolitan branches members began casting around for the next premier, someone with a ‘middle of the road, socially progressive approach’ like Mike Ahern.46 Bjelke-Petersen rapidly lost control of the situation, accusing Sparkes of talking ‘hot air’ and telling him to mind his own business.47 Sir Edward Lyons told the Fitzgerald Inquiry that Bjelke-Petersen had been motivated by the employment prospects the development would bring and the fact that he foresaw ‘an extra safe seat for the National Party’.48 East-West withdrew its proposal, but it was clear that this was one battle the Premier had lost.

The Lindeman Island affair brought the tensions between Sparkes and Bjelke-Petersen into the public arena, but, thanks to the 1985 redistribution which took the zonal system to greater strength, the Nationals won the 1986 election with a majority increased from one to seven. Bjelke-Petersen announced in his victory speech that ‘our assault on Canberra begins right now’.49 Privately, he indicated that he was going to Canberra to ‘sort the place out’50 by removing the ‘socialist’ Hawke government.

There had been intimations of a possible federal campaign involving Bjelke-Petersen after the 1983 state election. At that time, calls for a new conservative political force to defeat the Hawke government were endorsed by both Sir Robert Sparkes and Bjelke-Petersen, who jointly suggested Queensland as the springboard for such a movement.51 The central tenets of the Queensland movement were the dismantling of Labor’s ‘socialist’ legislation, including Medicare, support for Queensland-style free enterprise and the eventual introduction of a ‘flat-tax’ system. ‘Joh for Canberra’ was not on the National Party organisation’s agenda. Sparkes recalls that the party organisation was ‘aghast that he might be contemplating such a move’.52

The origins of the ‘Joh for Canberra’ and the even more ambitious ‘Joh for PM’ campaigns lay in ‘the culture of Gold Coast capitalism’53
personified by Gold Coast businessmen Brian Ray and Mike Gore. Gore had already benefited from Bjelke-Petersen’s support and patronage. His Sanctuary Cove Resort had been made possible by special government legislation taken through all stages in the early morning, and a $10 million loan. There is some confusion about who first thought of the possibility of a Bjelke-Petersen prime ministership. In one magazine interview Gore said, ‘It wasn’t Joh’s idea. He was sceptical at first’. Allen Callaghan, by this time Chairman of the Queensland Film Corporation and Under Secretary of the Department of the Arts, National Parks and Sport, confirms this and recalls: ‘... the Premier knew, by the way, that he was being used. He knew it because he said it to us and it was Mike Gore who talked him into it.’ Paul Kelly, however, records that the original inspiration came from Bjelke-Petersen himself. Bjelke-Petersen denies this, but it was usual for him to mask his ambition and appear the reluctant candidate:

I had no personal desire to become Prime Minister: after nineteen years as Premier I was long past the stage of wanting to satisfy any private ambitions. The power and prestige of the job had not the slightest attraction for me. My only motive was to clean up the disastrous mess Australia was slipping into politically.

Whatever the truth of the movement’s origins, Bjelke-Petersen was rapidly sucked in. Even Callaghan acknowledges that ‘there was an element of vanity in it too. He might be the saviour of the nation …’

Despite Bjelke-Petersen’s protestations, power and prestige were not meaningless to him. He was a modest man in private life and much of his political appeal lay in his ordinariness. It was inevitable, however, that power would bring changes. Under Beryl Young’s tutelage he became ‘a very stylish dresser’. Even Florence made some changes: ‘when she hit Canberra, she suddenly discovered the King-aroy dressmaker wasn’t quite the thing’. Bjelke-Petersen partook of the trappings of office, including his official Jaguar limousine, his own jet aircraft which, according to one report, had ‘seat-belt buckles and ashtrays plated with real gold’ (Allen Callaghan says, however, that these were standard fittings) and sumptuous surroundings. His suite in the Executive Building reportedly included a terracotta bust of the Premier in the style of a Roman emperor.
was encouraged in his own imperial ambitions by Beryl Young and Ted Lyons, but ‘Sparkes was alarmed, sensing a grand delusion of unpredictable consequences’.63

As Sparkes and others realised, the ‘Joh for PM’ campaign was an impossible venture. The political culture beyond Queensland was different. It was unlikely that Bjelke-Petersen could gain the parliamentary leadership of the federal National Party and, even if he had succeeded in this aim, the National Party could never become the senior coalition partner. Further, if Bjelke-Petersen decided to start a new ‘Joh’ party instead of operating through the National Party, the federal electoral system would work strongly against any new party capturing power in the House of Representatives. Not only did Bjelke-Petersen ignore such impediments, he convinced himself that they were irrelevant. He also convinced other New Right figures including John Stone, John Leard, Lang Hancock, Charles Copeman, Andrew Hay, Ian McLachlan, Robin Gray, Katherine West and Geoffrey Blainey to help his cause in some fashion.64 Stone became the Premier’s financial adviser and a National Party senator.

Sparkes tried to persuade Bjelke-Petersen against the Canberra campaign, but having failed, and to avoid splitting the party, he agreed to run the ‘Joh for Canberra’ campaign. The formal notice came in a motion drafted by him and passed by a Central Council meeting in February 1987:

That the National Party of Australia (Qld) fully supports the move by Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen to attain the Prime Ministership so that he can put in place an anti-socialist federal government equipped with appropriate policies and the will to implement those policies …

1. Recognising that no great battle can be won by great and charismatic generalship alone, and hence that a vital prerequisite for the success of the Joh for PM campaign is adequate official organisational structure, we strongly recommend that, wherever practicable, existing National Party structure be used …65

The apparent convergence of interests represented by the shared campaign masked a continued deterioration of relations between the two men, with Bjelke-Petersen undoubtedly aware of Sparkes’ lack of authentic commitment. Joseph Siracusa, a Queensland academic
recruited to become Bjelke-Petersen's national security adviser, claims that, at this time, 'their hatred for each other overwhelmed the courtly setting and polite manners'.

Once Sparkes took over, Gore and the Gold Coast entrepreneurs withdrew. Whether or not the funds they promised were ever a reality is debatable, but campaign funding was inadequate for an already impossible task. Bjelke-Petersen's ambitions forced a split in the federal parliamentary National Party. Sparkes ordered the Queensland Nationals to withdraw from the coalition, precipitating its end. This gave Hawke the opportunity to strike the final blow at the 'Joh for PM' campaign by calling an early double dissolution election. Bjelke-Petersen, in Disneyland at the time, had not yet nominated for a federal seat and was totally unprepared. Sir Leo Hielscher, the State's Under Treasurer and others who were travelling with him, urged him 'to back off quickly' and make a deal with the leader of the federal Liberal Party, John Howard. By this time, Hielscher says, Bjelke-Petersen 'was listening to other people' and ignored their advice. In the end, however, he was forced to call off the campaign. Labor won the election and returned to office with four additional Queensland seats. Bjelke-Petersen denied any responsibility for the coalition losses or his own defeat. He blamed Ian Sinclair, leader of the federal National Party, McLachlan, president of the National Farmers Federation, the Australian people for being so foolish as to re-elect Hawke, and the National Party led by Sir Robert Sparkes, saying, 'that's what went wrong ... I regret that I ever allowed them to come in'. Sparkes, especially, he saw as culpable: '... if Sparkes hadn't gummed it up, then it would have worked.' Bjelke-Petersen, ever the populist, summed up the difference between him and Sparkes: 'Bob always wanted to do things by the book, the constitutional way ... I wanted to do them and worry about the rules later.'

The 'Joh for PM' campaign bore all the hallmarks of what one author refers to as 'an old-age immortality project' whereby narcissistic and self-made politicians defy death by erecting lasting monuments to themselves. An example is the aging Henry Parkes and his obsession with federation. Bjelke-Petersen was willing to defy political convention, and indeed reality, to press his own claims to
immortality. His hubris knew no bounds. In the dying days of the ‘Joh for PM’ campaign, he told Ian McLachlan:

I’m not going to give up the premiership to be number two. You must understand that. I’ll be prime minister, even if we don’t win more seats than the Liberals I’ll be prime minister. That’s why I’m running.\(^{73}\)

After the failure of the assault on Canberra, Sparkes was in the ascendant. Not only had Bjelke-Petersen publicly failed in his bid for the prime ministership and been instrumental in Labor’s re-election for a third term, but he had lost control of Queensland’s political agenda. His deputy, Bill Gunn, had initiated the Fitzgerald Inquiry into corruption in Queensland. He had also nominated Sparkes for another term as party president. Sparkes won comfortably, receiving almost 80 per cent of the votes cast. As if to rub salt in Bjelke-Petersen’s wounds, Sparkes’ position on a number of key policy issues received endorsement at the Party’s 1987 annual state conference. These included the introduction of condom vending machines, prostitution regulation and, some old sticking points between the two men, sex education in schools and the setting up of a foreign land register.\(^{74}\) Sparkes described the conference as a watershed, marking a ‘distinct movement from the Petersen era to the post-Petersen era’.\(^{75}\) The following year Bjelke-Petersen, still denying reality, blamed this liberalisation of party policy for his demise:

People wanted to change the policy of the party, they wanted to go into a freer, easier lifestyle … prostitution, abortion, condoms and loose living … therefore, they said ‘alright, we’ll have to get rid of you’.\(^{76}\)

It was clear to all, bar Bjelke-Petersen and those closest to him, that his premiership was over. The last Bjelke-Petersen government had, in the words of the Cribb Report, become ‘arrogant and self-serving’\(^{77}\) and, confronted with opinion polls showing declining support for the Premier, Sparkes indicated that Bjelke-Petersen should make way for Mike Ahern. A Morgan Gallup Poll of voters taken in the dying days of his premiership in 1987 showed that approval for Bjelke-Petersen as Premier had reached an all-time low of 22 per cent. Even among National Party voters support was down 14 per cent to 46 per cent.\(^{78}\) Despite the signs of fading support, Bjelke-
Petersen persisted. Now isolated from organisational and bureaucratic advice, he relied instead on Beryl Young, Senator Florence Bjelke-Petersen, and his new press secretary, Peter MacDonald.\textsuperscript{79} His own account of his tactics at the time shows his lack of regard for parliament, party and due process.

First, he tried to regain the initiative by announcing that his resignation would take place on his twentieth anniversary as premier, 8 August 1988. He attempted to continue as he always had, but his 'actions were being perceived by many senior people within his party as those of a person who was convinced he was greater than his party, and who was prepared ultimately to place his own self-preservation ahead of his party'.\textsuperscript{80}

Bjelke-Petersen, for his part, saw a conspiracy by Sparkes 'to get rid of me ... he and many management members were in league with Bill Gunn, Mike Ahern and Brian Austin'.\textsuperscript{81} Bjelke-Petersen hoped to defeat the plotters by a repeat of the ingenious tactics used during the 1985 SEQEB dispute and the 1975 appointment of Patrick Field to the Senate. In those days, however, he was well advised, knew what he was doing and, in the eyes of his ministers and the majority of the public, exercised legitimate power. These circumstances no longer prevailed, but Bjelke-Petersen went ahead with a scheme which depended for its success on the Governor's approval:

The one strategy which seemed to offer a glimmer of hope was to put together a new Cabinet which I could take into the next election. I could not have formed a new Cabinet while Parliament was sitting, because I would have been defeated on the floor of the House. A few days after Parliament closed, therefore, I decided to sack five of the ministers I felt were against me.\textsuperscript{82}

Sir Walter Campbell, aware that Bjelke-Petersen's support within the parliamentary party had collapsed, advised the Premier that if he resigned he might not be re-commissioned and that he should discuss any restructuring with his ministers. He also counselled Bjelke-Petersen against sacking five ministers, eventually agreeing to dismiss three. Bill Gunn and Geoff Muntz were reprieved but Mike Ahern, Brian Austin and Peter McKechnie were told to leave. Two of the ministers he moved against were reportedly sacked because of their
association with Sparkes, Austin because he had been seen speaking with Sparkes at the state conference, and Gunn for nominating Sparkes as President at the party’s annual conference after Bjelke-Petersen had left. Gunn was recorded as saying: ‘Of course I knew what was on. Joh was going to be Minister of Police and close down the Fitzgerald Inquiry.’ Ahern also believed that this was Bjelke-Petersen’s plan, although this was denied by the Premier.

Faced with an escalating crisis, the Party’s management committee met and used its constitutional powers to authorise a meeting of the parliamentary party, at which Bjelke-Petersen’s leadership was terminated. Don Lane remembers that ‘despite the overwhelming vote that removed Joh from the leadership, Members were visibly frightened of his potential to outwit us’. Bjelke-Petersen tried. With his own survival paramount and outweighing any ideological squeamishness he may once have had, he contacted the State Secretary of the Labor Party, Peter Beattie, about a possible agreement. To defeat Sparkes and the rest, he was prepared to open a dialogue with the enemy. His strategy was that the Labor and Liberal Parties would vote with remaining Bjelke-Petersen supporters in order to defeat an Ahern government on the floor of the House. Ahern pre-empted him, however, by getting all other members of the parliamentary National Party to sign a declaration of support which he gave to the Governor. Urged on by Sir Edward Lyons, Bjelke-Petersen persisted. At a meeting in a paddock at Bethany, he offered the Labor Party more staff and facilities and the dropping of eight defamation writs against ALP members, but he refused to commit himself to a redistribution. Beattie abandoned the negotiations. Bjelke-Petersen’s parliamentary and party support had totally evaporated but still he clung to power, refusing to resign, reasoning that: ‘Parliament was not sitting, so for the time being there was not a power on earth which could have forced me out of office if I did not want to go.’

However, he eventually saw no point in hanging on any longer. On 1 December 1987 he resigned. He was aided in reaching this decision by his party’s decision not to pay the legal costs of outstanding defamation actions if he did not step down.

When he resigned he treated the Governor with the contempt which he reserved for those whose authority prevailed over his.
According to his autobiography, he handed his resignation to Campbell with the words:

Well, Wally, old fella, you ought to be proud of yourself. You've done a mighty job, and I want to congratulate you. In the years to come I hope you have many proud, happy memories of what you've done. Good on you, old fella. Cheerio.90

Appointing ‘Wally’ Campbell as Governor was the only thing Bjelke-Petersen ever said he regretted doing.91

Sparkes remained as President until he finally resigned in 1990, having survived a challenge in 1988 by Mike Evans. On his departure, Sparkes cited as reasons his desire to act in the best interests of the party, a family health problem, and home and business responsibilities.92

His term in office had virtually coincided with that of the former premier and together they had fashioned a regime that, when their interests converged, was virtually impregnable. Each brought to the partnership what the other lacked. Sparkes brought organisational and tactical skills; Bjelke-Petersen brought political cunning and a populist leadership style which was in harmony with the attitudes and expectations of wide sections of the Queensland community. The premiership did not collapse as a result of assaults from without but because of internal tensions which deepened after the Nationals won government in their own right in 1983.

Increasingly, Bjelke-Petersen distanced himself from Sparkes and relied on more compliant advisers who appeared oblivious to the possibility that Bjelke-Petersen’s messianic streak could lead him to destroy the Party. His childhood socialisation had left him resentful of constraint, and his adult political socialisation had taught him that ‘strong’ leadership was applauded in Queensland. Sparkes was the only person whose power came close to matching the Premier’s. In no other sphere of his political activity was there an equivalent restraining influence.
Notes
20. Metcalf, op. cit., p. 79.
22. ibid.
24. ibid.
25. ibid., p. 42.
27. ibid.
28. In 1983 Neville Bonner was moved to the third position and replaced by Kathy Martin whom it was believed stood a better chance against Florence Bjelke-Petersen. Bonner resigned and stood unsuccessfully as an independent.


33. Metcalf, op. cit., p. 73.


36. ibid.

37. ibid.


42. P. Coaldrake, Working the System, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1989, p. 5.

43. Reynolds, op cit.

44. P. Reynolds, draft manuscript, Lock, Stock and Barrell: A Political Biography of Michael John Ahern.


50. Lane, op. cit., p. 212.


57. Bjelke-Petersen, op. cit., p. 213.
59. ibid.
65. Quoted in Kelly, op. cit., p. 310.
69. 'The Joh Tapes on Leadership', Frontline Celebrities, Brisbane, 1988, video-recording.
70. Quoted in Kelly, op. cit., p. 309.
76. 'The Joh Tapes'.
77. M. B. Cribb, Report arising from a version of the National Party of Australia, Queensland to identify and report on issues for the future direction of the party arising out of the party's loss of government at the last state election, 25 June 1990, Brisbane, p. 8.
81. Bjelke-Petersen, op. cit., p. 246.
82. ibid., p. 247.
86. ibid., p. 118.
87. ibid., p. 120.
88. Bjelke-Petersen, op. cit., p. 250.
90. Bjelke-Petersen, op. cit., p. 251.
92. Lane, op. cit., p. 221.
CHAPTER 8

THE PREMIER AND CABINET

If there ever was a golden age of parliament in Queensland, it had ended long before Bjelke-Petersen became premier. All modern parliaments have seen an erosion of their functions and this was particularly marked in Queensland where the trend was exacerbated by the lack of an upper house, widespread ignorance of parliamentary convention and the expectation within parliament and the community of strong political leadership. Parliament in Queensland, as elsewhere, was dominated by cabinet. Within this framework, the Premier set the tone and determined much of the content of government action. There was no parliamentary equivalent of Sir Robert Sparkes. Labor, operating in a culture that barely gave legitimacy to the parliamentary opposition, was seldom effective. Much of any residual parliamentary resistance to Bjelke-Petersen and his policies came from within the Liberal Party but with limited success. After 1983, when this largely ineffectual irritant was removed from cabinet, Bjelke-Petersen’s position became superficially stronger, combining the roles of premier and treasurer. The loss of the Liberals’ modest moderating influence and expertise in their portfolios, especially Treasury, coincided with the serious deterioration in his relations with Sparkes. His new circle of advisers was politically inexperienced and so admiring of him that none of them were willing, or able, to oppose him. Bjelke-Petersen, who had long chaffed against constraint, was freer than ever before to chart his own course.

An exploration of Bjelke-Petersen’s relations with parliament and cabinet shows the evolution of his leadership style, from diffident
beginner who leaned on Chalk's shoulder and could not persuade cabinet to buy him an aircraft to aging autocrat who faced no opposition of any consequence. Unlike many prime ministers who have seen advantages in an argumentative, challenging and intelligent cabinet, Bjelke-Petersen's psychology was such that he needed to be in control of a subservient body. With no Sparkes to challenge him, his management of cabinet and parliament showed very clearly his growing quest for autonomy, his intolerance of opposing views once he had set upon a course of action, his populist disregard for the institutional checks and balances which a parliamentary system is expected to provide, and the toleration of his increasingly authoritarian leadership style by the majority of Queenslanders. His management of cabinet and parliament also demonstrated his political skills and his intuitive understanding of what motivated his colleagues. Their recollections show a man with contrasting sides to his personality. He could be charming and helpful, or given to displays of ferocious anger. As his premiership grew, such displays became more common and frequently greeted attempts to thwart him.

Within state confines, a premier can exercise greater power than the prime minister. Both premier and prime minister are the point of contact between government and the Crown's representative, have the predominant say in the timing of elections, control the agenda for cabinet meetings, influence the composition and terms of reference of such cabinet committees as are formed, initiate administrative reorganisation, set guidelines for ministerial behaviour, are the centre of media interest, and dispense honours, titles and patronage. A National Party premier, like a Liberal prime minister, can both choose and dismiss ministers. The most important decisions are made by the premier (or prime minister), usually after discussion with ministers or other advisers, but not necessarily in cabinet. Even allowing for the constitutional, legal, parliamentary, party and social constraints, the Australian leader is still possessed of "a tremendous power". This was especially so in Queensland during the Bjelke-Petersen era, when many constraints were weak and the premier's power was enhanced by the personal and informal processes on which cabinet was based. Decision making was 'hit and miss'. There was no developed cabinet office, and because during the last years of his government cabinet
submissions did not go to department heads, power was further concentrated in the hands of the Premier and, his advisers. Personal briefing sessions were held for the Premier prior to the cabinet meeting. These were attended by the permanent head of the Premier's Department, the Premier's press secretary and senior public servants as required, and Beryl Young, the Premier's pilot. Bjelke-Petersen, whom Chalk had early tagged 'a lone ranger', confirms that often he got things organised before he went to cabinet. Under Treasurer Leo Hielscher remembers seeing him 'go into cabinet and ... win a cabinet decision one to 17 — he's the one.' On some issues, such as the Gair Affair, he 'didn't even tell my cabinet ministers a lot ... because it would leak'. Mike Ahern said that after 1980, when he finally joined cabinet, it had no say in imperial honours. (Bjelke-Petersen and Police Commissioner Terry Lewis were knighted in 1984 and 1985 respectively.) In Bjelke-Petersen's mind, cabinet was there to ratify his judgment. He adopted the practice of bringing forward, under oral matters, any topic he chose. For example, at the last cabinet meeting he chaired, he proposed that the government pay approximately $200,000 to terminate defamation actions he had taken against Opposition members. Don Lane recalls the practice of 'late submissions', which were in fact 'sometimes dubious proposals that were held out of the Friday Cabinet bag and presented for first sighting at the meeting on the Monday'. Major decisions were often treated in the most cursory fashion. The decision to award the authority to prospect the giant Winchester South coal deposit was awarded to BP-Thiess-Westfield on the basis of a four-page document presented to cabinet by Mines Minister Ivan Gibbs half an hour before the lunch break. Sir Leslie Thiess was a friend of the Premier and there were suggestions at the time that the decision 'was not unrelated to this relationship.' In 1991 the Supreme Court found that Thiess had bribed Bjelke-Petersen in order to obtain the Winchester South contract.

Bjelke-Petersen's position was strengthened by advice from officers of the Premier's Department, which had a policy division, and some technocratic expertise as a result of a merger with the Co-ordinator-General's Department. The Department served the Premier rather than cabinet and, with its help, Bjelke-Petersen enjoyed a monopoly
of the information available in cabinet discussions.\textsuperscript{19} His preference was to deal with topics at a general level, leaving ministers to defend the details.\textsuperscript{20} They were aided in this task by ministerial committees, which not only helped in the drafting of legislation, but also channelled the energies of ambitious backbenchers.\textsuperscript{21}

It has been suggested that debate and compromise within cabinet are an impediment to unfettered power. Cabinet ministers are not the agents of a leader’s will and ‘whilst he can insist on getting his own way in cabinet, he cannot habitually do so’.\textsuperscript{22} This, it is usually argued, is more likely to be the case in a coalition cabinet.\textsuperscript{23} One author, writing early in the Nicklin premiership, surmised that ‘the position of the Premier in a Country–Liberal Coalition Government is unlikely to assume for quite some time, if at all, the dominance of the Premier under Labor Governments’.\textsuperscript{24} None of the four reasons the author put forward to explain the premier’s pre-eminence under Labor was altered under the coalition: respect within the community for a strong personal executive, the way in which the role had evolved from the colonial era, the premier’s general supervisory control over the whole administration and his election by caucus.\textsuperscript{25} It had not taken long for Nicklin to become an authoritative figure and Bjelke-Petersen, with a more sophisticated media machine, without the constraints of affiliated unions and unhampered by an egalitarian ideology, became even more dominant than his Labor predecessors. This happened despite the presence of the Liberal leader in cabinet and despite the latter’s retention of the Treasury portfolio.

Bjelke-Petersen’s style of dealing with cabinet colleagues oscillated between that of ‘old world courtesy’ and ‘bold political disciplinarian’.\textsuperscript{26} Sir Robert Sparkes’ most recent assessment is that Bjelke-Petersen was ‘definitely schizophrenic to some extent’.\textsuperscript{27} Although probably not clinically accurate, the description captures, in layperson’s terms, the dual characteristics of Bjelke-Petersen’s personality and goes some way towards explaining the very different ways in which colleagues remember him. The fact that he might erupt at any time undoubtedly encouraged a conciliatory and unthreatening approach on the part of his colleagues. Authoritarians operating in a sympathetic culture expect, and usually get, subservience from those below them in the hierarchy.
Bjelke-Petersen's Jekyll and Hyde personality, which, with his capacity to fly into rages, was beginning to resemble his father's, is invariably recalled by those who worked closely with him in cabinet and elsewhere. Sparkes describes him as 'so soft natured, so gentle, quiet, then he'd “do his nana” and rant and rave like Adolf Hitler'.28 Bill Gunn remembers him as 'very good to work with, very easy to work with' and as 'very kind-hearted in lots of ways'. Well into the premiership, Bjelke-Petersen still 'would work half the night' but he was less puritanical than he used to be. Although he ate little, he had unbent sufficiently to enjoy a joke and a glass of wine.29 Gunn concedes, though, that the Premier 'had a bad temper when he wanted to'.30 Allen Callaghan's view is that 'he could be very inflexible if he wanted but on the whole he was a good politician and a good bloke'.31 Callaghan found that Bjelke-Petersen would adopt good ideas, like increasing the size of the National Park Estate, including the Brisbane Forest Park, and take them to cabinet, but 'he could be bloody stubborn ... When he made his mind up on an issue, that was it'.32 Sir Leo Hielscher who served him as Under Treasurer remembers him with affection as a 'Dutch uncle', someone 'who seemed to be able to win anyone who came into close contact with him' but who could also be stubborn: 'The old Danish jaw would go out and that's the end of that. You may as well forget it because you'd lost him.'33 A respondent to a survey of cabinet leadership describes him as 'an enigma', adding that, for most of the time, he was a 'benevolent dictator' but could also be a mixture of 'excitement, ratbaggery and down-right vindictiveness'.34 Bill Hewitt's recollections are similar. He remembers 'an incredibly courteous person and that is true of him till the end of the premiership in his better moods. Quiet, courteous, accommodating, all of those things ... but at his worst ... quite terrible'.35

He adds that Llew Edwards used to 'tell us how completely unreal he was, how he was ranting and he was raving'.36 An anonymous ministerial source told a journalist that the Premier 'was shaking with rage' as he yelled at Mike Ahern for being unwilling to act against condom-vending machines installed illegally by three university unions.37 Don Lane also describes the 'fantastic performances' which occurred when Bjelke-Petersen lost his temper:
Those who experienced them will never forget them. Occasionally they would occur in Party meetings when he was confronted by Liberal members on issues on which he had taken a firm public stand, such as the right of appeal against the denial of a permit for street marches.

Joh would start to yell and threaten the Member (usually with an ill-timed election) and at the same time go red in the face and become more incoherent. 38

Most of his National Party colleagues were in terror of him on such occasions. The Liberals generally agreed that the Premier was just a touch unbalanced and it fell to Knox and then Edwards to quieten him down, sometimes with the assistance of senior National Party ministers such as Russ Hinze and Ron Camm.

Sir Robert Sparkes, always a match for Bjelke-Petersen, describes the transition from ‘quietly spoken modest sort of bloke’ to ‘raving, roaring bull’ when he got upset. Such behavioural swings became more pronounced as the premiership progressed. In the early days, ‘he was very diffident but towards the end he was even the reverse almost’. 39

Although Bjelke-Petersen’s leadership style was typically authoritarian in the rigidity of his beliefs, on issues on which he had not made up his mind it appears that he was prepared to seek advice, just as he had done as a businessman and entrepreneur. His inclination may have been, however, ‘to seek the advice of similar-minded confidantes’ or even those who went along with him, whatever their private views. 40 Allen Callaghan says that Bjelke-Petersen would test his ideas widely before running with them and in that sense was a consensus politician, but whether or not such testing extended to those with a radically different world view is unlikely. For example, he asked Sir Edward Lyons to assess cancer therapist Milan Brych, hydrogen car inventor Steven Horvarth and oil-seed promoter Dr Oskar. 41 Presumably, given Bjelke-Petersen’s public support for the men, Lyons went along with Bjelke-Petersen’s optimistic assessment of their projects.

Callaghan sums up Bjelke-Petersen’s approach as: ‘God had sent him and he had this faith that he was sent, so he had no doubts about that but he was also willing to listen.’ 42 It appears, however, that as the premiership progressed, the first part of the equation held more true...
than the second. When he did seek advice, he was very susceptible to influence. Tony Fitzgerald (National Party, Lockyer) found that Bjelke-Petersen had a tendency ‘to veer with the breeze of every new piece of advice’. Gunn makes a similar judgment: ‘You had to be the last one in ... it didn’t take a great deal to convince him on certain things.’ Gunn cites the hydrogen car as an example. Sometimes Bjelke-Petersen’s pragmatic bent would cause him to abandon his principles. Gambling was a case in point, and, when his personal survival was at stake, his willingness to parley with the ALP.

So dominant of cabinet did Bjelke-Petersen eventually become and so compliant its members that decisions made in his absence with which he disagreed were frequently rescinded upon his return. In 1984, at a meeting at which the Premier was absent, cabinet rejected a recommendation which Bjelke-Petersen had supported regarding a clearer delineation of public service staff and resources. Before the next cabinet meeting Bjelke-Petersen overturned the decision. No minister objected. As the previous chapter indicates, Bjelke-Petersen refused to accept cabinet’s approval of a foreign land ownership register. Despite the fact that Sir Robert Sparkes and the National Party organisation also supported a register, Bjelke-Petersen stated that it would never become law in Queensland. His attitude towards foreign investment was the same as it had always been: ‘There’s a tremendous amount of money coming into Queensland for big business and after all, we’re trying to encourage investment in the state.’

Although the most powerful influences came from outside cabinet, ministers who hoped to influence the Premier needed to lobby him and their colleagues prior to the cabinet meeting. Those most likely to exert influence in this forum were the senior ministers seated near the Premier. Bill Gunn explains:

The closer you got to the Premier, he heard, but if you were right down on that end, say if you were number 18, you had less chance. But I was very fortunate. When I was in Education, I sat about halfway down. I could get a bit of a say, but each one brings their submissions ... and you would seek the backing of a couple of other members.

Bjelke-Petersen’s control of the political agenda can be seen in the
way he managed a series of major issues so that government policy reflected his wishes. It was not unusual for him to make decisions and report back to cabinet after the event. In these circumstances, cabinet was no more than a rubber stamp. Bjelke-Petersen was the driving force behind the most extreme and controversial decisions of his premiership, such as the declaration of the state of emergency during the Springbok tour in 1971. Prior to the Brisbane match, rugby games in the southern states had been interrupted by demonstrators protesting against apartheid, and Bjelke-Petersen determined that this would not happen in Brisbane. He was told by the Police Commissioner that Ballymore oval, the usual venue for rugby games, could not be secured and that the RNA Showgrounds was the only place that could be. Bjelke-Petersen explained what happened next:

I rang the President of the Show Society and I said to him: ‘... I want the exhibition ground for playing the Springbok matches …’

They said: ‘No way, Mr Premier, we’ve got an exhibition coming up in three weeks … and the unions will black ban us.’

So I said: “Well you had better all come into my office”.

So I had in the meantime, ready for the fact that they wouldn’t do it, I had the papers to declare a State of Emergency drawn up and I just signed them in front of them when they said no … so I signed the State of Emergency and handed it to the President and said: ‘Well the grounds are mine now and I’ll take them.”

Allen Callaghan provides a contradictory footnote to this explanation. He says that ‘the idea to take over the exhibition grounds for the state of emergency was Sir Gordon Chalk’s but Sir Gordon was not game to put his name to it — that was his problem all the time’. The state of emergency, provided for in Section 22 of the State Transport Act of 1938, was declared without reference to parliament or to the McMahon government in Canberra. This was despite the fact that the Queensland government needed Commonwealth permission to use the army barracks at Enoggera to accommodate 600 regional police being brought into Brisbane. The state of emergency covered not just the RNA grounds but the whole state and was proclaimed for ten days before the first game and fourteen days after the last, ‘in case the police had any unfinished business’. According
to one legal expert, Section 22 was characterised by ‘extraordinarily wide definition of the circumstances in which it may be invoked, an extraordinary width of resultant powers, and complete absence of parliamentary safeguards’. The original legislation had been introduced by a Labor premier, Forgan Smith, with only perfunctory debate and without reference to its full implications.

Bjelke-Petersen recalls with satisfaction that ‘the games … put me on the map’. His response to the Springbok tour set the pattern for a premiership marked by confrontation between him and various dissenting groups. In the case of the Springbok tour, opposition came from the Labor Party, university students, some clergy and the union movement. Liberal backbencher Bill Hewitt expressed his concern, to no avail. Forty trade unions declared a 24-hour strike. This, and the demonstrators resisting police outside the Springbok’s hotel, provided Bjelke-Petersen with the sort of conflict which he found politically rewarding and personally satisfying. He denies ever being stressed at these times, declaring: ‘… I enjoyed it. Relaxing, great fun. It was a game of chess in the political arena and I never found it stressful …’

On this occasion, it was a game he won. Like previous Queensland premiers, he learnt that an authoritarian leadership style carried no electoral penalty. On the day of the Springbok’s game in Brisbane, Liberal candidates won two by-elections, the Brisbane seat of Merthyr (thereby bringing Don Lane into parliament) and the regional seat of Maryborough, which had been held by Labor for forty years. On the following Monday, cabinet decided to grant every member of the state police one week’s extra leave, a gesture which undoubtedly cemented the allegiance of many police to the government and established a pattern of close relations between the Bjelke-Petersen government and the police force.

Bjelke-Petersen also pushed an initially reluctant cabinet into supporting his confrontationist approach to industrial relations. As a backbencher, he had signalled his opposition to unions and the 40-hour week. His attitudes had not changed when, in 1982, teachers commenced rolling stoppages on the issue of class sizes. He ordered that they be dismissed, despite the opinion of the Solicitor-General’s Department that the government had no legal authority to sack
teachers. Cabinet refused to support the Premier on this issue and the government persuaded the Queensland Teachers Union to halt industrial action in anticipation of additional funding. Bjelke-Petersen was on shakier ground than usual in taking up a confrontationist stand, because the teachers had the support of the parents and citizens organisation.

Usually Bjelke-Petersen could rely on public and media impatience with strikers to outweigh community concern over breaches of civil liberties. Nevertheless, cabinet balked at some of the proposed provisions of the 1979 Essential Services Bill, such as the loss of a driving licence for life for union members using their own vehicles to organise strikes. An amended bill was finally agreed to by cabinet after a 48-hour strike in the power industry, but it still contained worrying implications for civil liberties. In 1982, in Bjelke-Petersen's absence overseas, the government agreed to a 38-hour week for blue-collar employees of the government and railways; they had demanded a reduction to 35 hours. On his return Bjelke-Petersen denied there had been an agreement, thus provoking industrial action. He responded to this in the hard-line fashion of previous premiers and invoked the Essential Services Act to declare a state of emergency.

His approach to striking South-East Queensland Electricity Board (SEQEB) employees in 1985 took a similar course and showed very clearly how little input cabinet had to the decision-making process. He had reached the conclusion that 'you have to override people for their own good' and, according to Bjelke-Petersen, this is what happened during the SEQEB strike. He says that he had to persuade Crown Law, different departments, Ivan Gibbs and Vince Lester not to give in to the strikers. Sir Leo Hielscher confirms this, saying that Bjelke-Petersen 'won that on his own ... I thought he was going a bit too far but as it turned out, he was right'. In the end, cabinet left him 'to do the front running' and he reported to them weekly.

At the heart of the SEQEB dispute was the use of contract labour. The Electrical Trades Union responded to its introduction to the industry with a series of rolling strikes, leading to blackouts which affected increasing numbers of consumers. In response, the Queensland government invoked the State Transport Act 1938–1981 to
declare a state of emergency. Bjelke-Petersen, replaying an old theme, told parliament that the strike was just a ploy to get the same money for less work.\(^{64}\) Cabinet, at the urging of Bjelke-Petersen, approved the dismissal of 900 striking workers, depriving them of superannuation benefits and replacing them with non-union labour that signed contracts with no-strike clauses. Sir William Knox suggested that the contract system be extended to other essential services such as teaching, nursing and garbage collection,\(^{65}\) giving the lie to those who thought that if the Liberals had remained in the coalition the legislation following the strike would have been less draconian.\(^{66}\) The substitution of 'coercion for industrial relations in Queensland'\(^{67}\) was, as Bjelke-Petersen had anticipated, an electorally successful strategy. Despite pickets and demonstrations, including academic staff protests at the University of Queensland over the award of an honorary doctorate to Bjelke-Petersen — someone that they considered had so little understanding of liberal democracy —\(^{68}\) 'he had a pretty fair idea that if he took this step the people of Queensland would back him'.\(^{69}\)

He must also have been sure that Queenslanders would back the abolition of death duties. This stand by Bjelke-Petersen in 1977 showed his ruthlessness, capacity for manipulation of cabinet, and political cunning. It also brought him into direct conflict with Gordon Chalk. The topic was dear to his heart because he had been forced to pay death duties on his parents' estate. His father's refusal to give him the property before he died, which would have enabled him to avoid duty, had been especially galling and may have contributed to the passion and conviction with which he fought the issue. He recalls the procedure that occurred when his father died: 'they value every thing they can find, every fork and every knife is counted, everything I had, everything.'\(^{70}\) Many in the community had shared this experience. Death duties as an issue was especially meaningful to National Party members, because of the impact of duties on rural properties and their association with 'Marxist doctrine'.\(^{71}\) National Party policy on death duties was already in place, having been designed by former Party treasurer Sir Neville Henderson who had made submissions to the federal government on the subject.

Death duties was not the first source of conflict between Chalk and Bjelke-Petersen. They had sparred over the road transport levy
more than twenty years before and more recently over liquor law amendments, on the establishment of the Queensland Cultural Centre, and on whether or not a casino licence should be issued in Queensland. Bjelke-Petersen, at this point true to his convictions, had opposed the last proposal whereas Chalk was an enthusiastic supporter. Bjelke-Petersen won on liquor reform, Chalk and his supporters overcame Bjelke-Petersen's opposition to the Cultural Centre (which the latter argued would do nothing for country people), and the casino lobby eventually prevailed (Jupiter's Casino on the Gold Coast opened in 1985). Chalk, however, was outmanoeuvred by Bjelke-Petersen on death duties.

Bjelke-Petersen recalls that one day in 1976 'without telling anybody, I just went to the cabinet and I said to cabinet “I'm going to abolish death duties and gift duties” ...'\(^{72}\) Chalk was irate because no written submission had been made on what, in his view, was a Treasury matter which would lose the state $26 to $28 million dollars in revenue.\(^ {73}\) Cabinet divided along party lines so Chalk suggested a joint party meeting to resolve the issue. Bill Gunn remembers that Chalk 'made a great passionate speech'.\(^ {74}\) Bjelke-Petersen says that Chalk was well prepared and spoke for an hour and a half:

He said: 'Are you prepared to forgo that high school that was going to be built, that you had been promised and you know it's coming and you announced it? Are you prepared to forgo that?' and you'd say 'no' and he went through every item and when he finished he went to the next one. So I just sat alongside Gordon at the end of the table and all the boys were sitting around in the Chamber and when he finished he turned to me and said: ‘Well, there you are, Mr Premier, there’s not one of them that would support you. They know that if they support your motion, they are not going to get these things because we just can’t afford them.’\(^ {75}\)

In response to Chalk's concern about potential revenue loss, cabinet made a quick decision to introduce football pools to Queensland, despite Chalk's argument that revenue from this source could not be used to offset losses incurred by the abolition of death duties.\(^ {76}\) The latter was such an important issue to Bjelke-Petersen that he was prepared to jettison his earlier concerns about the evils of gambling and to threaten his colleagues with electoral retribution:
I’m going to make you one promise … any of you in the room today that support Gordon’s motion … I’ll have put on the front page of the local paper with a nice frame right around it that you, John Smith, the member for the area, voted in favour of death duties and gift duties. Now, who’s supporting Gordon’s motion? Put your hand up so I can see who it is … and I’ll keep my promise …

The strategy of asking members to raise their hands or respond individually was to be used again. On this occasion, according to Bjelke-Petersen’s recollection, only Chalk, David Byrne (Liberal, Belmont) and Brian Lindsay (Liberal, Everton), who advocated a gradual removal of the duties, raised their hands. Byrne and Lindsay lost their seats at the next election, held in 1977, not because of this issue, but in the swing back to Labor after the 1974 debacle. In addition, Byrne had received very bad publicity over accusations of arson which he made against Labor Senate candidate Mal Colston. Years later Bjelke-Petersen claimed that if he had bothered to campaign against Chalk, he could have made it awkward for him.

Gunn believes that the revenue lost from death duties was returned in stamp duties from property transactions when retirees from the rest of Australia rushed to the Gold Coast.

The combination of electoral success, fear, charm and undemanding performance standards generally procured loyalty to Bjelke-Petersen from his ministers. (A survey of ministers in the Fraser, Hawke, Cain and Bjelke-Petersen cabinets found that Bjelke-Petersen scored the lowest rating on the item ‘Communicated expectations of high performance to me’.) He was reluctant to dismiss poor performers like Sullivan and Tomkins. Allen Callaghan recalls that Bjelke-Petersen was urged on many occasions to get rid of ‘the logs’ but ‘there was this sort of loyalty and reluctance to sack ministers because they would sit on the backbench and foment trouble …’ Ministers were elevated to cabinet not by talent but by seniority, with some further consideration of geographical representation. The knowledge that they were moving incrementally towards a cabinet post provided an incentive for backbenchers to endure a long — and silent — apprenticeship. Those who were perceived as critics, like Mike Ahern, forfeited their place in the queue.
In contrast was the group of Bjelke-Petersen loyalists to whom Liberal backbenchers referred as the ‘dog squad’. This was:

a small but powerful group within the party that sits at the front of joint party meetings and offers the Premier their unquestioning support, and verbal opposition to anyone with the temerity to express an alternative view.\(^8^4\)

One member of this group was the late John Goleby, Minister for Water Resources and Maritime Services, who regularly brought the Premier fruit from his farm.\(^8^5\) Vic Sullivan remembers that Goleby would bring boxes of passionfruit: ‘We’d get them for $2 each. Joh got his for nothing!’\(^8^6\)

Even if all ministers were not so generous, there were no rivals to Bjelke-Petersen’s hold on power between 1970 and the disintegration of the premiership in 1987. He had learned his lesson from the ‘coup’ and could enjoy the rare luxury for a political leader of relative security of tenure. Thus one of the constraints on a leader’s power — the ambitions of the heirs apparent — was, if not absent, unable to reach fruition.\(^8^7\) Within cabinet, Bjelke-Petersen was the undoubted patriarch. Although there were aspirants to the premiership, among them Ron Camm, Vic Sullivan, Russell Hinze, Ivan Gibbs, Mike Ahern and Bill Gunn, none of them was a serious contender between 1970 and 1987. Bjelke-Petersen was too successful electorally and Sparkes too aware of the need for party unity to permit a rival to threaten the Premier’s power. Speculation about a successor to Bjelke-Petersen presumed that he would eventually step aside, not that he would be deposed.

The fantasies about succession which occupied the minds of some cabinet ministers were based on this latter assumption. Vic Sullivan recalls a scenario which, rather fancifully, given the politician’s tendency to hold on to power, permitted both him and Ron Camm, the likely beneficiary had the 1970 ‘coup’ succeeded, to take turns at the premiership:

Ronny Camm was another very good deputy to him. He was there for many years and you know he could have stepped aside and given Ron three years and this is what Ron and I thought he might do. And Ron
said to me, ‘If it happens, three years will do me and then you can take over.’ But it didn’t work out that way ...**

Camm’s support of Millmerran as the site for a new power station in 1974 over the Premier’s preference for Tarong, in his own electorate, impacted negatively on Camm’s chances of succession. When Sullivan, as Primary Industries Minister, offered Camm the job of Chairman of the Sugar Board, telling him, ‘I don’t think you’ll ever be premier’, Camm agreed and resigned from parliament at the 1983 election. He was duly followed as deputy by Sullivan. Sullivan was forced to resign after the Melbidir affair, but it is doubtful if he had the skills, or the numbers, to be premier. Russell Hinze, although regarded in some quarters as a competent administrator, was another without the numbers to be premier, or indeed deputy.89 He, Gibbs and Mike Ahern were defeated by Bill Gunn for the position of Deputy Premier after Vic Sullivan’s resignation (Ahern by one vote on the third ballot). Hinze greeted this news with the observation that Gunn ‘was not premiership material’.90

Like Bjelke-Petersen in his climb towards the premiership, as Minister for Works and Housing Hinze had tried to build support by travelling extensively to backbenchers’ electorates where his Department built bridges, roads and racecourses.91 He made no secret of his ambitions, announcing that he expected to take over as premier after the Commonwealth Games in 1982. Sir Robert Sparkes declared Hinze’s announcement ‘somewhat premature’.92 Peter Nixon, who liaised with Bjelke-Petersen on behalf of Malcolm Fraser, and who relied on Hinze as a conduit to Bjelke-Petersen, found him to be both trustworthy and the possessor of the ‘most astute brain in the Queensland cabinet’.93 Inside Queensland, judgments were less flattering. Mike Ahern’s assessment of Hinze’s premiership potential was negative: ‘Nobody could tolerate Hinze, he was not in serious contention ...’94 Gunn told Hinze, too, that he had no hope of the premiership and stood against him in 1980 for the Deputy’s position at the request of six or eight members whom Hinze apparently believed might support him. Gunn describes some of the machinations associated with this particular leadership contest:

... I said, ‘Russ, this business of you going for Deputy Premier ... you
haven't got a chance’, and he said, ‘I think I have’ and he pulled out a sheet of paper. He had all these ticks and these fellows had been in my room.

‘You think those chaps are supporting you?
‘Well,’ I said, ‘Did they say they would?’
‘Oh, not exactly but I can tell by their attitude.’
Anyway I think he only got six votes altogether … so he hated me ever after …

Hinze and Gibbs were eliminated on the first ballot. Gunn and Ahern tied on the second.

There were other factors involved in Hinze’s lack of success. The removal of Sir Edward Lyons from the chairmanship of the TAB had damaged Hinze’s relationship with Bjelke-Petersen, although the two remained on cordial personal terms until the end of the premiership. Hugh Bingham surmises that such an odd relationship can be explained by Bjelke-Petersen’s attraction to risk takers and their associations with development, progress and getting government out of the way of both. Bill Hewitt thinks Bjelke-Petersen saw Hinze as a protector, ‘tough and burly’. Allen Callaghan, however, says that Bjelke-Petersen ‘was aware of Hinze and concerned about Hinze but again Hinze was one of those who would have gone on the back­bench and really fomented trouble’, as he did when Ahern demoted him. Given the publicity associated with him, it would have been difficult to remain oblivious to Hinze’s activities. That he remained in cabinet, as minister in charge of racing, when he had commercial interests in gallopers, trotters and bloodstock, provides further evi­dence of Bjelke-Petersen’s blind spot regarding conflict of interest.

He was supported in turning a blind eye by his coalition colleagues. Bill Hewitt feels that ‘there is a sharing of guilt all round’, but recalls the pressures:

When Kevin Hooper started hitting Hinze with these accusations … the backbenchers feel [sic] they have got to close ranks and be supportive of that minister and take on the opposition, rather than say: ‘Is there some truth in this?’

Hinze had certainly taken risks. He had embarrassed the govern­ment by being photographed, shirtless, at ‘beer belly’ contests, but,
more importantly, he faced a series of allegations of impropriety, including the land rezoning scandal referred to in a previous chapter. In the same year he had been accused of using his electoral office for private business dealings, there was talk of a conflict of interest in his dealings with the Moscow Narodny Bank, and he had been questioned about land transfers within his family group of companies. In 1983 allegations surfaced about wrongful involvement in milk quota distribution. Two years later Labor parliamentarian David Hamill (Ipswich) alleged conflict of interest over the relocation of a road in Hinze’s electorate which represented considerable advantage to the Hinze gravel company, Maralinga Pty Ltd. Another Hinze family company, Junefair Pty Ltd, was alleged to be interested in securing a TAB branch licence in Oxenford. It was claimed that Hinze, as the responsible minister, had obstructed a rival group’s application. In 1985 the Auditor General found that by paying $12,500 for a private box at Doomben, Hinze had breached an Act he administered. The Fitzgerald Inquiry found that Hinze and related entities had received benefits of approximately $4.2 million from developers and others. Hinze died of cancer before he could face eight counts of official corruption, including allegations that he accepted $520,000 in bribes. Property developer George Herscu was found guilty of bribing Hinze, and Albert Scheinberg, also a property developer, admitted to three counts of bribing Hinze.

Ivan Gibbs’ star shone briefly but his standing slipped over his handling of the selection of the successful tenderer for the Winchester South coal mine. Bill Gunn was generally considered to be the heir apparent because he most closely resembled Bjelke-Petersen, a likeness which even extended to physical appearance. He was, however, less intimidating than Bjelke-Petersen and, according to Don Lane, nervous members preferred to deal with him rather than the Premier. Lane claims that Gunn combined this patronage power with his Masonic links to advance his own cause, but until the ‘Joh for Canberra’ campaign and his establishment of the Fitzgerald Inquiry in Bjelke-Petersen’s absence, Gunn was a loyal and deferential deputy who posed no threat. Once Bjelke-Petersen indicated his federal aspirations, Gunn, Hinze and Ahern began canvassing their leadership options.
Ahern, the most obvious successor on the grounds of talent, had long been perceived by Bjelke-Petersen as a threat. There is no doubt of the antipathy between the two men. Bjelke-Petersen had grown up in an era when the sectarian divide was pronounced, and for Joh’s family ‘the real ogres were the Catholics’, leading to suggestions that Ahern’s Roman Catholicism may have been a factor in Bjelke-Petersen’s dislike of him. Another suggestion traces the antagonism to an association with Ahern’s father, a former National Party state president. Peter Beattie claims that John Ahern told his son, ‘Joh’s got a Bible in one pocket and a revolver in the other. Watch him.’ Both explanations may have been correct, although Vic Sullivan’s Catholicism appears not to have been a barrier to his advancement, nor in another arena, was Terry Lewis’s religion. (Lewis was, however, worried that his Catholicism might be a barrier to promotion. His diary notes, ‘No. 1 [Bjelke-Petersen] really a bigot — so worried re religion.’ Then again, many saw Sullivan as the ‘token’ Roman Catholic. Unlike Ahern, though, Sullivan was not well educated, outspoken or critical, all characteristics which Bjelke-Petersen resented in others. Lewis was famously obsequious and this may have compensated for his Catholicism.

Belatedly, Bjelke-Petersen gave Ahern the Primary Industries portfolio, accepting Hinze’s advice that it would be preferable to have Ahern inside cabinet, bound by the doctrine of collective responsibility to display loyalty to his leader. As a minister:

There was a limit to the number of times Mike Ahern (or anyone else) could stand up to Bjelke-Petersen in Cabinet. If ministers seriously took Bjelke-Petersen on, they faced instant dismissal from Cabinet and nobody in the Parliamentary National Party would support them.

Bjelke-Petersen’s domination was thus assured. Backed by his electoral success and the party organisation, his management of cabinet ensured that there were no threats to his leadership. In this context, cabinet was more often than not a rubber stamp for his views. Sometimes the extremity of the Premier’s position concerned Liberal ministers, but, until the coalition split in 1983, and as long as the Bjelke-Petersen government kept winning elections, the Liberals wrestled with their consciences largely in private and very occasion-
ally within cabinet. Only at the end of his premiership did Bjelke-Petersen fail to dominate cabinet. For example, by late 1987 he was unable to convince cabinet to approve Sir Edward Lyons’ application to build a hospital at the Gold Coast.115

Notes
5. ibid., p. 359.
8. Halligan, op. cit., p. 43.
15. Lane, op. cit., p. 223.
16. ibid., p. vi.
17. Priest, op. cit., p. 245.
20. ibid.
21. ibid.
23. ibid., p. 326.
25. ibid.
26. Lane, op. cit., p. v.
28. ibid.
30. ibid.
32. ibid.
36. ibid.
38. Lane, op. cit., p. 88.
45. Don Lane refers to the Cabinet in which he served from 1980 to 1987 as 'usually compliant'. Lane, op. cit., p. v.
50. ibid.

55. J. H. Wootten, quoted in Harris, op. cit., p. 113.

56. Ibid., p. 112.


58. Ibid.

59. Harris, op. cit., p. 191.


61. ‘The Joh Tapes on Leadership’.


63. ‘The Joh Tapes on Leadership’.

64. Queensland, Legislative Assembly 1979, *Debates*, vol. 280, p. 2172.


68. For an account of the connection between Bjelke-Petersen’s honorary degree and the SEQEB strike, see G. P. Shaw, ‘They Can Go South’, in Shaw, op. cit., pp. 5–9.


70. Bjelke-Petersen, pers. comm., October 1993.

71. A. Metcalf, *In Their Own Right: The Rise to Power of Joh’s Nationals*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1984, p. 188.


73. Hazlehurst, op. cit., p. 290.


75. Bjelke-Petersen, pers. comm., October 1993.


77. Bjelke-Petersen, pers. comm., October 1993.

78. Lane, op. cit., p. 76.


85. ibid.


87. Emy, op. cit., p. 324.


89. Charlton, op. cit., p. 80.


91. Lane, op. cit., p. 137.


94. Reynolds, op. cit.


107. Lane, op. cit., p. 137.


109. Terry White, quoted in Reynolds, op. cit., p. 33. Bill Hewitt says that Catholicism and a falling out with Ahern’s father were the most popular explanations around parliament.

112. Reynolds, pers comm., October 1997. Political scientist Paul Reynolds, who has spent many years researching Queensland politics, told me that this view was held by various colleagues of Bjelke-Petersen.
114. Cribb, quoted in Reynolds, ibid.
Chapter 9

The Premier and the Coalition

During Nicklin’s ten years as premier the Coalition had functioned relatively harmoniously, but almost from the beginning of the Bjelke-Petersen premiership there was a steady deterioration in relations between the partners. Discussions on amalgamation of the two parties petered out in acrimony. The underlying cause lay in the competition between the two parties for seniority, and this was exacerbated by the Nationals’ push into urban seats. As a general rule, Liberal ministers were prepared to trade off their disquiet at some of Bjelke-Petersen’s authoritarian stands for seats in cabinet. The backbench and the party organisation were less willing to accept both their junior status and the government’s hostility towards Liberal ideology and policy. Disputes erupted around electoral redistributions, three-cornered contests involving sitting Coalition members, parliamentary reform, and issues such as street marches and government appointments. An examination of Coalition relations, culminating in the 1983 split, demonstrates the generally ineffectual nature of Liberal opposition.

Of all the Liberal leaders Chalk appears to have been the least intimidated by Bjelke-Petersen, who in the early years of the premiership was the less experienced leader. Also, the two men were of the same political generation. Chalk had no qualms about airing his differences with the Premier publicly and was usually better briefed by his Treasury team than Bjelke-Petersen was by his departmental
officers. Despite this, and despite Chalk’s alternative power base in Treasury, as the premiership progressed the balance of power tipped increasingly towards Bjelke-Petersen, so that ‘Chalk felt himself gradually being engulfed by a malevolent rival sitting two floors above him in the Executive Building’.2 By the time Chalk resigned in 1976, Bjelke-Petersen was clearly ascendant and no Liberal leader, until Terry White’s disastrous 1983 venture, was prepared to challenge him on a major issue.

To Chalk, who had once harboured premiership ambitions, it became increasingly clear that he would advance no further. After the 1974 election he commented, ‘It looks like we won the race but lost the prize’.3 The Liberals ended up nine seats behind the Nationals, although they won 31.1 per cent of the primary vote compared with the Nationals’ 27.9 per cent4 and were ‘so close in many seats that a few thousand votes here and there would have seen Sir Gordon Chalk as premier’.5 Neither at this point nor in 1971 had the parliamentary Liberals tried to force a more equitable distribution of electorates.6 They were afraid that a number of Liberals would join the Nationals rather than cross the floor to vote with the ALP.7 Thereafter the Liberal parliamentary position deteriorated, as in 1977 and 1980 Labor took more Liberal than National seats. From 1977 the Nationals were also outpolling the Liberals in the popular vote. Bill Hewitt feels that Chalk, with no hope of the premiership, resigned because of the workload he was carrying. Bjelke-Petersen excelled in travelling the state meeting people, ‘but he was never a detail person. He didn’t want to read long submissions … ’8 As a result he would depart Brisbane by midday Friday, leaving Chalk with the paperwork. Bill Gunn experienced the same thing when he was Deputy. He recalls that Bjelke-Petersen would leave Brisbane as early as Thursday.9

In 1977 Chalk was succeeded as Party leader by Bill Knox who was notably acquiescent and therefore very satisfactory to Bjelke-Petersen, if not to many in his own party. Knox’s public announcement that he did not care if his own popularity rating declined providing there was a commensurate increase in support for the Premier did nothing to endear him to his backbench, nor indeed to party supporters polled in 1977, who perceived him as a weak leader.10 Likewise, his assertion on assuming the leadership that a major target
of his term of office would be amalgamation with the Nationals was not welcomed by many in his party.\textsuperscript{11} Llew Edwards supplanted Knox as leader in 1978, in the expectation that he would be more successful in standing up to the Nationals. Although Bjelke-Petersen’s reaction to Knox’s replacement was ‘chilly and one of veiled displeasure’, Edwards failed to live up to expectations, scoring only limited successes against the Premier. One federal official expressed the opinion that, as far as influencing Bjelke-Petersen was concerned, Edwards was ‘utterly agreeable [but] could never deliver’.\textsuperscript{12}

Liberal ministers had most to lose from upsetting Bjelke-Petersen because for much of the Coalition’s life they depended on Bjelke-Petersen for advancement. This was also true of backbenchers. Of the Liberal leaders, only Sir Gordon Chalk and Llew Edwards had some independent authority to nominate ministers, and, in the case of the latter, this may sometimes have been compromised.\textsuperscript{13} Bill Knox had to defer to the Premier who allegedly vetoed the Liberal leader’s nomination of Bill Hewitt (Greenslopes) for the ministry.\textsuperscript{14} Similar allegations were made regarding Edwards’ nomination of Hewitt in the early months of his leadership.\textsuperscript{15} Hewitt, however, accepts Bjelke-Petersen’s denial that he was instrumental in Hewitt’s exclusion,\textsuperscript{16} despite the fact that during the 1977 election campaign a letter in support of the National Party candidate for Greenslopes and signed by Bjelke-Petersen claimed that ‘Noel Cannon is the only candidate who stands by the coalition; the only candidate on whose wholehearted support the Deputy Premier, Mr Knox and myself, can rely on in the new Parliament’.\textsuperscript{17}

Bjelke-Petersen had the ultimate responsibility for allocating portfolios, although he normally consulted with the Liberal leader. Once in cabinet, Liberal ministers who disagreed with him were handicapped in making their feelings widely known by his insistence that the concept of ministerial responsibility be extended to joint party meetings. At these gatherings, Don Lane recalls, members would often ‘quaver under his stare, or vie for his attention’.\textsuperscript{18} The intimidating atmosphere was exacerbated by the ministers’ tendency to gravitate towards the Premier and join him in facing the backbenchers. Lane also recalls Bjelke-Petersen’s skill in reading body language and his careful observation of who was whispering to whom in the party.
An examination of issues on which there was discord demonstrates Bjelke-Petersen's management of coalition relations and where the balance of power lay.

In 1977 the unilateral decision by Bjelke-Petersen to ban the MACOS (Man: A Course of Study) school social studies course from Queensland's education system, and, further, to send public servants to schools to confiscate MACOS material, reportedly had 100 per cent ministerial agreement. Two Liberal ministers, however, told journalist Peter Charlton that they had opposed the decision in cabinet. That they had been reduced to leaking news of their rebellion suggests frustration at their inability to have any impact on cabinet decision making. Although there was reportedly similar disquiet in cabinet ranks about the banning of the SEMP (Social Education Materials Project) curriculum materials, the majority were swayed by the submission to cabinet from Rona Joyner, whose advocacy had led to the banning of SEMP and MACOS. Mrs Joyner was a National Party member and friend of Florence Bjelke-Petersen. Bill Knox's public response shows why he had Bjelke-Petersen's support. He agreed with the Premier, indicating at a Liberal Party area conference that parliament (cabinet), not the Education Department, would make policy decisions.

A more serious rift between the coalition partners developed in 1982 over the appointments of Chief Justice and Senior Puisne Judge to replace Sir Charles Wanstall and Mr Justice Lucas respectively. This incident shows clearly some of the characteristics that marked the Bjelke-Petersen premiership: his reliance on advice from outside the ministry, his inflexibility once his mind was made up, his resentment of opposition to his position and his sense of betrayal if those perceived as loyalists disagreed. The incident also demonstrates that although the Liberals achieved a minor concession they were ultimately compelled to bow to Bjelke-Petersen's will and back away from their original hard-line stand.

The origins of the dispute lay in Liberal Attorney-General Sam Doumany's belief that, on the basis of seniority, convention favoured Mr Justice James Douglas to replace Sir Charles. Bjelke-Petersen, advised by Sir Edward Lyons and Terry Lewis, had decided to elevate Mr Justice Dormer Andrews who had already had an unusual
promotion from the District Court to the Supreme Court. There were allegations at the time that Don Lane had established that Douglas had cast an absentee vote for Labor in 1972 in Lane’s electorate of Merthyr, and that this had been a factor working against Douglas’s appointment. Journalist Quentin Dempster suggested that the Premier was annoyed with the judiciary for barring him from the opening ceremony of the new Supreme Court building because he was a litigant before the courts.²³

Doumany indicated that the future of the coalition hinged on the outcome of these judicial appointments. According to Terry White, Bjelke-Petersen lobbied National Party ministers to support him.²⁴ Despite his acceptance of the decision at the time, in retirement Vic Sullivan described the failure to appoint Douglas as ‘the most foul decision that the government made’ and also recounted the lobbying process, including Lyons’ and Lewis’s involvement:

... Joh said: ‘Oh Vic ... you know the three of them [Andrews, Campbell and Douglas] are Catholic ...’ and I just nodded my head. I damned well knew that two of them hadn’t been inside a church since they left school but old Jim Douglas was a practising Catholic ... Wally Campbell was a good bloke but he admits he’s an atheist and the other fellow, Bob Andrews, similarly. But see, Sir Edward Lyons, he sold this idea to Joh and Joh listened to him. Matter of fact, he put on a little cocktail party one afternoon and he invited Ken Tomkins and myself along to it ... Sir Terry Lewis was there, and Sir Robert, Bob Andrews ...²⁵

At the Cabinet meeting, using a proven strategy, Bjelke-Petersen asked the ministers one by one for a decision. Cabinet divided along party lines. In a compromise, Walter Campbell was appointed Chief Justice and, against Liberal opposition, Andrews was elevated to Senior Puisne Judge. All Liberal cabinet ministers indicated, on the Executive Council Minute for the appointment of Andrews, that the appointment did not have their support. Hewitt says that ‘when it came to Bill Knox, Joh was disappointed and said, “Even you, Bill”, almost like Christ identifying Judas, “Even you, Bill”.’²⁶ Nevertheless the Minute was signed by the Governor, Sir James Ramsey. It was rumoured at the time that upon Sir James’ retirement in three years’ time Campbell would become Governor, and Bjelke-
Petersen's choice, Dormer Andrews, would then become Chief Justice. Despite outrage among the Liberals about this interference in judicial independence, and the use of party numbers in cabinet in breach of the coalition agreement, they opted to remain in coalition.

They also met defeat in the crucial area of state development where Bjelke-Petersen sought to make his mark. Not only was this ideologically important to him, but the opportunities for pork barrelling make the provision of infrastructure a subject of keen interest to politicians of all complexions. In addition, there were claims that favoured treatment was given to donors to the Bjelke-Petersen Foundation. With this conjunction of circumstances, it comes as no surprise that the Liberals were outvoted on a number of strategic infrastructure decisions.

One of the most significant, in 1978, was the location of Queensland's new power station, a process which Cribb describes as 'an example of the kind of authority that a strong-willed premier can exercise over cabinet colleagues, when he chooses to do so'. After extensive consideration, the State Electricity Commission (SEC) had recommended Millmerran on the Darling Downs. Bjelke-Petersen favoured Tarong, in his own electorate. The SEC Report advanced a number of reasons for preferring Millmerran, including the possibility of earlier development, a rail link to Brisbane, less air pollution and a cost advantage of approximately $260 million. In cabinet six Liberal ministers supported the Mines Minister, Ron Camm. The rest of the Nationals supported Bjelke-Petersen who, despite continuing controversy, announced that cabinet's (i.e. his own) decision was final.

Bjelke-Petersen guided cabinet towards a similarly controversial decision on the Port of Brisbane Authority's recommendations regarding stevedoring rights over a new container terminal. The Authority recommended Associated Container Transportation Australia Ltd. Bjelke-Petersen favoured Brisbane Wharves and Wool Dumping (BWWD) in a consortium with the Australian National Line. An independent assessment by a firm of chartered accountants cautioned against giving BWWD a monopoly over Brisbane's container operations, but the Premier persisted, against a background of speculation about donations to the Bjelke-Petersen Foundation.
A further indication of Bjelke-Petersen’s domination lies in the fact that, even on issues at the heart of small ‘l’ liberal ideology, he was able to prevail, ensuring that Liberal cabinet ministers fell in behind the Nationals. In 1976 a student demonstrator was struck by a baton-wielding policeman. The Police Commissioner, Ray Whitrod, ordered an investigation but cabinet decided that there would be no inquiry. Announcing the decision, Bjelke-Petersen indicated that cabinet felt that if an inquiry were warranted, it was into the actions of the demonstrators, not the police. Liberal leader, Bill Knox, acquiesced. Later that year, as opposition to uranium mining grew, the Premier announced, without contradiction from the Liberals, that the day of the political street march was over.

Anybody who holds a street march, spontaneous or otherwise, will know they’re acting illegally … Don’t bother applying for a march permit. You won’t get one. That’s Government policy now.

Bill Hewitt remembers that the legislation for the street march ban resulted from a lunch-hour meeting of the joint parties. He was, absent, but in retrospect believes that it was scandalous that the Liberals did not oppose it. It became very clear that Bjelke-Petersen was intolerant of opposition rather than street marches per se, when exceptions to the policy were permitted. A planned march by miners at Collinsville protesting about unemployment and inflation was allowed. Bjelke-Petersen attempted to explain this apparent contradiction to Parliament:

I referred, of course, to marches that would not be tolerated, that is, marches conducted by those who engage in violence and have the overthrow of our sort of life as their objective … Obviously their march is aimed at what the Whitlam Government did to this nation — the high prices and high costs it forced on the nation — and everybody supports them in their protests.

The National Party’s Lin PoweII offered a further clarification when he suggested that ‘demonstrations of loyalty’ such as the Anzac Day march and Brisbane’s Warana parade would be allowed. Liberals Don Lane and Charles Porter, who had always been closer to Bjelke-Petersen than to their own party, were vocal in their defence
of government policy so at odds with the spirit of liberalism. Other Liberal ministers held their tongues, even when, in 1977, the Traffic Act was amended to remove the right of appeal to a magistrate against a refusal by police to issue a permit to march. An appeal to the police commissioner was substituted. In giving evidence to the Fitzgerald Inquiry, Bjelke-Petersen acknowledged that the motivation for transferring the power over permits to the police was political: the police knew that it was government policy not to grant permits. In the two-year period from 1977 to 1979 when permits again began to be issued, 1,972 people were arrested in Brisbane during confrontations between police and demonstrators.

For some of the demonstrators, the costs were high. Bundaberg dentist Harry Akers, accompanied by his dog, marched without a permit, and in heavy rain, down an unnamed Bundaberg road in the early hours of the morning. He was protesting against the erosion of civil liberties in Queensland because he felt that what was happening was wrong and good people had to take a stand. He applied to the local police traffic superintendent for a permit, but it was denied on the grounds that he was planning a protest march. The local newspaper explained the conditions: ‘He could proceed as a single pedestrian along a public road without a permit to march, but it was essential that no one else accompanied him. It would then become an unlawful march.’ The situation was farcical, but frightening for Akers:

The dog ‘Jaffa’ — who made it a possible procession, hence unlawful — was there as I thought I was going to be attacked. Police did not want a test case over the term ‘procession’ nor the lawful or unlawful presence of a dog.

Akers also faced harassment from the provincial right, and community doubts about his sanity. The Bundaberg News-Mail, which Akers believes was editorially fair in its treatment of the issue, still felt the need to reassure its readers that ‘Mr Akers vehemently denies that he is some kind of “nut”.’ Akers felt vindicated by the findings of the Fitzgerald Inquiry, but Bjelke-Petersen remained intransigent. Under questioning at the Inquiry, the former Premier described Akers as a ‘fool’ and denied that the street-march legislation was absurd.
Llew Edwards confronted Bjelke-Petersen’s intransigence when he found himself at loggerheads with the Premier on a number of issues. He was forced to back down on the question of the Iwasaki Resort at Yeppoon on the Capricorn Coast. Bjelke-Petersen had responded with enthusiasm to the entrepreneurial Iwasaki, whose ‘initiative and drive’ he welcomed, brushing aside conservationists’ concerns about the project, and pushing the relevant legislation through parliament in a late-night sitting. Throughout the development of the resort there were rumours about the real intentions of the company, prompting Edwards to ask for an inquiry into the progress of the project. His decision was reversed almost immediately, presumably in response to pressure from the Premier. Bjelke-Petersen also succeeded against Edwards’ opposition in having Sir Edward Lyons appointed to chair the TAB. Edwards had put forward Sir Gordon Chalk as his candidate but was told in cabinet by Bjelke-Petersen: ‘I’m telling you it’s my choice; I’m having my way on this.’ Edwards and the other Liberal ministers refused to sign the cabinet minute recommending the appointment of Lyons but they were overridden by the Nationals’ superior numbers.

Edwards’ few victories over Bjelke-Petersen were not won in cabinet but because he had overwhelming outside support, either from the other states or from popular opinion. The former was the case when, as Health Minister, he, with Gordon Chalk, argued that Queensland should enter the hospital part of the Whitlam government’s Medibank scheme and accept the $52 million on offer. Negotiations with the federal government were handled skilfully by Edwards despite the opposition of Bjelke-Petersen. The latter was supported by National Party colleagues and Liberals Charles Porter and Dr Crawford. When other non-Labor states joined the scheme, Bjelke-Petersen and his supporters were isolated. The Premier signed the Medibank agreement in August 1975.

Edwards’ other notable successes occurred when, as Health Minister, and with the support of the AMA, he refused to support Bjelke-Petersen when the latter wanted to assist convicted cancer therapist Milan Brych in setting up a clinic, and when, as Treasurer, he would not guarantee a loan for Paraguayan businessman Shrian Oskar. In these instances the Premier had the tacit support of
colleagues and the public, most of whom tolerated such lapses of judgment or regarded them as harmless eccentricities of relatively small importance. On major issues of consequence to Bjelke-Petersen, the Liberals were invariably defeated in cabinet. Members of the Party organisation and the Liberal backbench, with less to lose, were always more restive than their cabinet colleagues, but they proved more of an irritation to the Premier than a substantial threat to his power.

There were differences between Liberals and Nationals in organisational culture. The Liberals were more inclined to act as ‘private members’, and they were prepared to criticise Liberal ministers, whereas the Nationals were much more disciplined. Allen Callaghan compares the Nationals with Labor in that they would brawl in private but present a united front to the public. The Liberals, on the other hand, were ‘like a bloody knife throwers’ convention ... they could never agree amongst themselves half the time and leaked like a sieve ...’ As early as 1964 a ‘Ginger Group’ of Liberals led by John Murray (Clayfield) had criticised government policy and style, and, in 1965, the Liberal Party State Convention supported a motion in favour of the principle of three-cornered contests, despite the existence of an agreement that neither coalition partner would stand candidates against each other’s sitting members. John Ahern, the National Party president of the time, showing that Queensland nationalism predated Bjelke-Petersen, castigated everyone on the Liberal Party executive as ‘something less than a Queenslander’.

Once Bjelke-Petersen’s leadership style and policy direction became apparent, it was inevitable that sniping between the parties would increase in frequency and intensity. The gulf between government policy and liberal ideology was too great for some on the Liberal backbench, and their party organisation, to bear. In addition, the party organisation, with the long-term interests of the party in mind, continued to favour the selective use of three-cornered contests, despite the inevitable impact on coalition harmony and their general lack of success in taking seats from the Nationals. In 1972 the Liberals stood candidates against sitting Country Party members in South Coast (Hinze), Redcliffe (Houghton) and Landsborough (Ahern), in addition to contesting seven vacant seats and eight held by the ALP.
Of these, they won only Townsville. Despite this failure, the Liberal Party organisation continued its push to gain coalition seniority. From 1972 each election saw an increase in the number of three-cornered contests, with the Nationals retaliating in earnest from 1976:

... by embarking on three cornered contests, each coalition party is simultaneously waging offensive and defensive campaigns, as each seeks to expand into the other's territory, while trying to preserve its own base from depredation.

Justification for these competitive manoeuvres was provided by the suggestion that such efforts increased the coalition vote. The decision to embark on three-cornered contests was one for the party organisation and was embraced with enthusiasm by it throughout the presidency of Yvonne McComb, which ran from 1976 to 1980. McComb called the Premier 'an affront to democracy', argued that 'we should not allow ourselves to be painted as unthinking acolytes of the Premier', and pressed for more three-cornered contests and a separate Senate ticket, thus provoking Robert Sparkes to describe the Liberal strategy as 'a declaration of civil war'. After 1977 there was bound to be an increase in three-cornered contests because of the creation of new seats which were unclaimed by any party. The end result of such internecine warfare was a 'stand-off' combined with inter-party bitterness. Despite this, the Liberal Party organisation and frustrated backbenchers continued to challenge the Nationals' organisational and political supremacy, until their misreading of the situation culminated, in 1983, in the disintegration of the coalition.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Liberal Party officials and backbenchers periodically raised concerns about the direction of government policy. They made little impact on their ministerial colleagues and provoked a hostile reaction from Bjelke-Petersen. Party Secretary John Leggoe, in 1977, flagged the danger to democratic values represented by 'a police state atmosphere' and stated that 'no Liberal should be reluctant to press for a change in the oppressive street march law'. Bjelke-Petersen struck back, claiming that the Liberals were 'anti-coalition', 'anti-Joh Bjelke-Petersen as Premier', and, in vintage style, accused 'some sections of the Liberal party of
trying to ride on the National Party’s coat tails while trying to cut our throats’. The 1978 Liberal Party convention passed resolutions rejecting the Nationals’ street march policy and calling for parliamentary reform. Backbencher Bruce Bishop (Surfers Paradise) urged a change in the street march legislation, but his cabinet colleagues, bound by cabinet solidarity and threats by Bjelke-Petersen to make street marches a campaign issue, maintained their public silence. The only exception was Charles Porter, Minister for Aboriginal and Island Affairs, who continued his public defence of government policy.

There was further backbench rebellion over the 1979 late-night destruction of the Belle-Vue hotel, when 13 Liberal backbenchers supported a Labor motion condemning this action. This was clearly a decision Bjelke-Petersen had made on his own. The Deputy Premier, Llew Edwards, announced that he had not been informed of the proposed destruction. Bjelke-Petersen ignored the furore and congratulated the contractors, the Deen Brothers, ‘on a job well done’. The regard was obviously mutual and long-lived, for the brothers sent the former premier a bouquet when he was confined to hospital with a blood infection in early 1998.

In 1982 Liberal backbenchers disagreed with the government’s approach to tenancy conditions at shopping centres. In the same year the Liberal Party executive and some of the backbench were critical of the decision by the Premier and the cabinet to pay the Premier’s costs in the defamation action taken against him by the president of the Fraser Island Defence Organisation, John Sinclair. Three Liberal backbenchers voted with the Opposition on the issue of sand mining on Moreton Island. Throughout this period successive Liberal Party conventions passed resolutions on electoral redistribution, parliamentary reform, a separate Senate ticket, street march laws, reducing National Party power in cabinet, asserting liberal values and establishing a public accounts committee. Few of the resolutions made any real difference to government policy, but the last was the straw that finally broke the coalition’s back.

The issue was symptomatic of a deep divide between some members of the Liberal Party and the government, and also between factions within the Liberal Party. On one side of the divide within the party was a group known variously as ‘the trendies’, the ‘Ginger
Group’ or the ‘small “I” Liberals’. Among the members of this informal grouping were Angus Innes (Sherwood), who in 1982 had challenged Edwards for the leadership but had been defeated, John Greenwood (Ashgrove), who had been dropped from cabinet in 1980 after Edwards became leader, Guelf Scassola (Mt Gravatt), Ian Prentice (Toowong), Terry Gygar (Stafford), Rosemary Kyburz (Salisbury), Rob Akers (Pine Rivers), Bill Hewitt (Greenslopes), who was promoted to cabinet by Edwards in 1980, and Terry White (Redcliffe), who had been elected at the 1979 Redcliffe by-election on a platform that sought eventual Liberal Party seniority in the coalition in order to ensure ‘responsible democratic government’. To National Party stalwarts like Alan Metcalfe, the Ginger Group’s priorities were awry:

Parliamentary reform is hardly one of the raging issues that arise in public opinion polls in Queensland. As far as the average voter is concerned, as long as he has a job and food on his table and prospects for the future he has the confidence that his government is doing its job.

Liberal leader Llew Edwards concurred with this pragmatic analysis when he observed that ‘Ninety-nine per cent of the people wouldn’t even understand what a public accounts committee is, let alone the people of Queensland …’

In retrospect, Bill Hewitt feels that the Liberals should have split the coalition on the issue of the appointment of the Chief Justice, because on the matter of a public accounts committee, ‘who understood what you were talking about?’ Edwards, who urged Liberals to become ‘good coalitionists’, had earlier warned the Party against ‘the propagation of trendy policies under the banner of small “I” liberalism — basic, stupid policies with little or no electoral appeal to the average Australian’. Later events were to suggest that this reading of Queensland’s political culture was correct, but years of frustration impelled the Ginger Group to act. For a long time, backbenchers and members of the Liberal Party organisation had been genuinely aghast at some of the Bjelke-Petersen government’s excesses. In many instances, this was combined with a state of denial regarding the realities of their junior status in Queensland. Finally, on the part of Terry White and his supporters, there was a misreading of Bjelke-Petersen’s character which was inevitably hostile to any chal-
lenge to his supremacy. Bjelke-Petersen, however, demonstrated a consummate understanding of both the political landscape and the psychology of the majority of his Liberal cabinet colleagues.

In March 1983 the Liberals had a small measure of success in achieving the first major revision of parliamentary procedures in 30 years when amendments were passed by parliament to permit, among other things, the Standing Orders Committee to report to parliament on proposals for the establishment of a public accounts committee and other committees of review and accountability. Following on this, when parliament resumed on 4 August Ian Prentice moved to bring forward debate on the possible establishment of a public accounts committee. If the Speaker Selwyn Muller had better understood a point of order raised by Edwards, the division may have been avoided, but Terry White, then Minister for Welfare Services, and the other members of the Ginger Group crossed the floor to vote for the motion with the ALP. Bill Hewitt absented himself. White argued that the principle of cabinet solidarity did not apply because there was no government policy on the issue, but Llew Edwards interpreted events differently and dismissed White immediately, with the Premier's vocal support. In a tumultuous sequence of events White replaced Llew Edwards as Liberal leader only to find that Bjelke-Petersen still would not permit him to return to cabinet. Bjelke-Petersen had already signalled what his approach would be when, in 1982, he had indicated that he would prefer to form a minority government rather than work with Angus Innes in the event of a victory over Edwards. Despite this warning, Bjelke-Petersen's attitude came as a blow to the Liberals who had expected the Premier to relent rather than take the risk of sacrificing the coalition. Such an expectation demonstrates a misreading of Bjelke-Petersen's leadership style which was never inclined to compromise when his authority was threatened. Bjelke-Petersen showed no such miscalculation in his dealings with the remaining Liberal ministers.

At the behest of their Party organisation, the Liberal ministers reluctantly tendered their resignations, but Bjelke-Petersen suggested to six of them (Bill Hewitt did not meet with him) that he would recommend to the Governor not to accept their resignations. The ministers were relieved but their reprieve was short-lived. All were
compelled by the terms of the Liberal Party constitution, and by the insistence of White and the Party organisation, now headed by John Herron, to tender their resignations once more. This time Bjelke-Petersen accepted their move and replaced them with National Party ministers until the October election.

Just prior to the Liberal leadership ballot, Bjelke-Petersen, in a move that demonstrated his political savvy, had, with the assistance of the Speaker, indefinitely adjourned state parliament. As the Speaker, Selwyn Muller, took the chair, both Bjelke-Petersen and Keith Wright, the Opposition leader, jumped to their feet, with Wright indicating a privilege motion. Muller ignored him — thereby ignoring the convention that matters of privilege take precedence — and called on the Premier to speak. The Premier moved that the House should adjourn immediately. The Liberals, who welcomed this hiatus in which to regroup, voted with the Nationals without fully recognising the implications. The new National Party minority government was thus able to govern in the nine-week lead-up to the election without the handicap of parliamentary scrutiny and with all the advantages of incumbency.

Those who suggested that the need for a public accounts committee was not a burning issue were proven right by the campaign. As one author recorded, that ‘the issues of public accountability and electoral reform that promised so much fire and brimstone in the early days of the crisis were lost in the race when the campaign proper settled down’. Bjelke-Petersen, with a rationale more revealing of his own character than the Liberals’ motivation, dismissed the need for a public accounts committee by claiming that advocates were primarily interested in the hundred dollars a day they would get for attending committee meetings. The Nationals’ campaign reverted to traditional themes, suggesting that ‘Now, more than ever, Queensland needs Joh and the Nationals’ and featuring a map of Australia with Queensland in green and the rest of Australia in red. The cause of the family featured, and, in deference to the voters’ utilitarian instincts, Bjelke-Petersen as the Treasurer in waiting released details of anticipated budget ‘goodies’ throughout the campaign. The Nationals outpolled the Liberals in 15 of the 18 seats they both contested, with
the Nationals eventually claiming 43 seats (two of which were those of Liberal Party defectors Don Lane and Brian Austin), the ALP 32, the Liberal Party 6 (after the two defections) and there was one Independent. Although the Liberals had been devastated, their preferences delivered government to the Nationals. Of the ‘Ginger Group’ only Innes and White retained their seats.

After the election, former Liberal ministers Don Lane and Brian Austin defected to the Nationals. Despite his ideological compatibility with the Nationals, Lane occasionally found decision making in an all-National cabinet disturbing. The Liberals, generally speaking, had been competent ministers, especially in the Treasury portfolio and in potentially troublesome portfolios like Aboriginal Affairs, Labour Relations and Health. With these in the charge of National ministers, full responsibility for decision making had to be assumed by the Nationals, many of whom were more comfortable with rural-oriented portfolios. According to Lane, the National cabinet was so preoccupied with rural issues that it could debate issues pertaining to the dingo fence for half an hour, but take only thirty seconds to approve Brisbane’s seven-year town plan. The quality of decision making was also affected by the reduction in expert advice provided to ministers. After the Liberals left the ministry, Bjelke-Petersen, fearful of leaks, decreed that senior public servants, with the exception of the Co-ordinator-General, the Under Treasurer and the chair of the Public Service Board, were not to have access to cabinet bags. This concentrated the premier’s authority but ministers were deprived of their traditional sources of advice. If Lane is to be believed, many of them were needful of assistance: ‘They were too dense to know, half of them were dills who couldn’t conduct a bus to the Valley.’ Vic Sullivan agreed, saying that ‘the four years from ’83 to ’87 was the worst government that Queensland’s ever had’.

If Lane had reservations, Bjelke-Petersen was comfortable in this environment in which virtually all opposition had been removed. Although the Liberals had done little to contain his power, they had, on occasion, forced him to respond to their arguments. Most of the pressure, however, had come from the party organisation and the backbench rather than the ministers who valued their cabinet membership. Although this Liberal opposition had been occasionally
annoying to Bjelke-Petersen, and possibly gratifying to some Liberal supporters, it was ultimately futile in having an impact on Bjelke-Petersen’s leadership style. After 1983, with treasury as well as the premiership in his grasp, Bjelke-Petersen reached the pinnacle of his authority. If neither cabinet nor coalition could contain him, it was unlikely that a parliament, dominated by the executive, would represent a serious impediment to his exercise of power.

Notes
1. A. Metcalfe, *In Their Own Right: The Rise to Power of Joh’s Nationals*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, p. 121.
5. Quoted in Lunn, op. cit., p. 208.
6. Cribb and Murphy, op. cit., p. 19.
7. Lunn, op. cit., p. 211.
15. ibid.
19. ibid., p. 94.
30. ibid.
31. ibid., p. 168.
34. Quoted in Brennan, op. cit., p. 127.
35. ibid., pp. 135, 141.
43. Quoted in Whitton, op. cit., p. 66.
45. Brian Austin, record of interview between Gary Chittick, Paul Reynolds and Brian Austin, 7 July 1993.
47. Quoted in Lane, op. cit., p. 67.
49. ibid., p. 10.
50. ibid.
55. C. A. Hughes, quoted in Hamill and Reynolds, op. cit., p. 20.
59. ibid., p. 167.
60. Lunn, op. cit., p. 295.
61. ibid.
64. Miller and Koch, op. cit., Introduction.
67. ibid.
71. ibid., p. 494.
74. Miller and Koch, op. cit., p. 16.
76. Metcalfe, op. cit., p. 205.
77. ibid., p.137.
78. ibid., p. 194.
79. ibid., p. 227.
80. Lane, op. cit., p. 65.
84. Undoubtedly there were opponents, like Ahern, in cabinet, but as Margaret Cribb points out above, he was not in a position to stand up to Bjelke-Petersen.
CHAPTER 10

THE PREMIER, PARLIAMENT
AND FEDERALISM

As a means of securing government accountability, the Queensland parliament during the Bjelke-Petersen era was a failure. Its relative impotence was well established before Bjelke-Petersen became premier, but under his government the process was accelerated by a combination of ignorance and design. Bjelke-Petersen showed little knowledge of parliamentary procedures, was known to have voted with the wrong side in divisions, and left the chamber as soon as he could after question time.1 There is little doubt that as a backbencher during Labor's regime Bjelke-Petersen had observed the processes that denied the opposition a legitimate role. This well-entrenched characteristic of the state's political culture was enhanced by Bjelke-Petersen's populism, whereby due process was perceived as an impediment to the people's will. Bjelke-Petersen's comment, quoted in a previous chapter, that he preferred to get things done and worry about the rules later, gives the flavour of this mindset. An additional factor, was Bjelke-Petersen's perception that he was accountable to a higher authority than state parliament, namely God, the Bible and his own morality.2

The most cursory examination of its procedures shows that parliament was unable to provide effective scrutiny of the Bjelke-Petersen government. Although the parliament during his era averaged a greater number of sitting days than its other state counterparts, there were long recesses. For example, almost six months elapsed
between the 41st parliament in 1977 and the 42nd in 1978. There was an eight-month break between the 39th parliament in 1971 and the 40th in 1972. In 1983 the parliament sat for 29 days, and, in the same year, for only 15 days in the ten months to October. During these long stretches ministers were accountable only to their party colleagues. 3 Even more damaging to the principle of accountability was the practice, started by Labor, of not sitting for some months prior to elections, thereby avoiding opposition and media scrutiny. As an example, prior to the October 1986 election parliament did not sit beyond 12 days, in February and March.

During the early years of Bjelke-Petersen’s premiership there was no systematisation of parliamentary proceedings because parliament was accorded neither high priority by government nor a meaningful role in the legislative process. 4 Before 1975 there was no Leader of the House. As a result, government business was not prioritised. The arrangements were left to Bjelke-Petersen and Chalk who frequently squabbled over the order of business. 5 Important legislation was often left till the small hours of the morning when most of the media representatives had gone home or sat exhausted in the Strangers’ Bar.

Local variations on traditional parliamentary practice further impaired accountability. The Australian custom of a partisan Speaker was pushed to the limits in Queensland where the post was described as ‘one of the plums of office, to be handed to a faithful party supporter’. 6 Queensland Speakers have persistently eroded the opposition’s parliamentary role by actions ranging from the censoring of Questions Without Notice to excessive naming of opposition members. 7 For example, from 1957 to 1977, of the 30 members ‘named’, 29 were Opposition members. 8 In Bjelke-Petersen’s era the most celebrated example of partiality was Selwyn Muller, who announced that it was the Speaker’s duty to apply the wishes of the government, 9 but some of his predecessors had also strayed as far from the Westminster tradition. During its long years in office Labor argued that impartiality disenfranchised the Speaker’s constituents, 10 an argument resurrected by Speaker David Nicholson, a member of the deputation that urged Bjelke-Petersen to resign as premier in 1970. At the time, Nicholson distinguished between his role as Speaker and his role as constituency representative. 11
Bjelke-Petersen unblushingly supported the idea of a partisan Speaker under his direct control. On occasions when the incumbent erred, the Premier’s ‘openly-displayed hostility’ brought about an altered ruling. In 1978 he took the opportunity of the issue of parliamentarians’ travel arrangements to erode the Speaker’s independence. Jim Houghton, the Speaker, had approved the longstanding but unethical practice of parliamentarians’ conversion of domestic travel vouchers to international tickets. An investigation by the Auditor-General revealed a misuse of funds, prompting Bjelke-Petersen, supported by Sparkes, to demand that all members concerned pay back the money and to warn that he would legislate to prevent this happening again. In due course, amendments to the Audit Act transferred responsibility for parliamentary appropriations from the Speaker to the Premier’s Department. Other parliamentary staff were responsible to the executive, not the parliament. On his retirement in 1980, Houghton described parliament as a ‘cess-pit’.

Bjelke-Petersen’s stocks in the community rose as a result of what was widely perceived as a principled stand against abuse of parliamentary position. The transfer of power to the executive went largely unnoticed.

Other practices further curtailed parliamentary scrutiny of the government. Until 1979 most debate on bills at the first reading stage occurred before they had been printed. This meant that the Opposition had no chance to read the bill before debating it. Inured as they were to the system, opposition members did not press for change. Possibly they felt that the system offered them some advantage, because, without a printed bill, the Speaker could not order members to speak to it, thereby creating an opportunity for grievance style debate over a minister’s portfolio. It is also possible that the 1979 change, dispensing with debate at the first reading stage, may have been introduced to protect one or two poorly performing National Party ministers rather than out of concern for the parliamentary institution.

Such changes when they came did little in practice to improve parliamentary scrutiny. Although Questions Without Notice were allowed after 1970, ministers often insisted that they be placed on Notice before being answered. A further impediment to any oppo-
sition member desirous of a response from the government was the practice of disallowing a right of reply to ministerial statements. Thus it was possible for a minister to make accusations against opposition members who had no formal right of reply. The Opposition also complained of ministers’ absence at Question Time and the lack of provision in the parliamentary schedule for debate on matters of current interest and concern.¹⁸

Permanent policy or investigative parliamentary committees did not exist and such committees as there were were poorly resourced and staffed. Bjelke-Petersen regarded all-party committees with suspicion, declaring that ‘we have the responsibility as an elected Government of running the state’.¹⁹ Given that he had largely avoided being accountable to cabinet and to his coalition partner, he had no desire to be the subject of scrutiny by a parliamentary committee. Although he sent Ahern and Hewitt on a trip to study parliamentary committee systems in other states, he refused to countenance the pair’s recommendations that a Public Works Committee and a Public Accounts Committee be established, while accepting a Subordinate Legislation Committee and a Parliamentary Privileges Committee.²⁰ Of the five committee members, Labor was allowed only one. Government backbenchers who had objected to the speed with which Bjelke-Petersen often pushed legislation through parliament urged the establishment of these committees, which, because they were composed of backbenchers, did provide a small measure of accountability.²¹ For example, in 1982 the Parliamentary Privileges Committee criticised the government for changing important legislation without reference to parliament and reported that 50 Acts had been altered by either proclamation or order-in-council.²²

Bjelke-Petersen’s attitude towards committees had been shared by previous governments and such committees as there were, namely Library, Parliamentary Buildings, Printing, Refreshment Rooms and Standing Orders, rarely met.²³ The Standing Orders Committee, which was responsible for parliamentary procedures, did not meet at all between 1950 and 1980.²⁴ This meant that such modifications to parliamentary procedures as occurred during this period were never referred to, let alone considered by, the Committee. Other necessary modifications, such as increasing the number of members constituting
a quorum in line with increases in the parliament's size, were never made.  

Select Committees, although they had been used in the Queensland parliament prior to the development of the party system, were abandoned under Labor, being replaced by departmental inquiries or Royal Commissions, both of which reported to the executive rather than to the legislature. Queensland was the only Westminster parliament with no Public Accounts Committee, fostering 'an environment in which virtually no thought was given to the principle of ministers, parliamentarians or officials differentiating public duty from private interest'. The lack of proper scrutiny extended to government departments. There were no committees to deal with estimates of expenditure, and cabinet decreed that only one-third to one-half of all ministries would have their estimates annually scrutinised by parliament. Although, in theory, the departmental estimates were to be rotated over time, some, like Treasury, avoided having estimates discussed at all, and the Premier's portfolio was not dealt with after 1979.

At an informal level, parliament changed during the Bjelke-Petersen era to an institution reflective of his leadership style. He was prone to see issues in terms of right and wrong and to give no quarter to those he perceived to be wrong. Prior to Bjelke-Petersen there had been a 'great sense of camaraderie' and friendships crossed parliamentary lines. For example, Charles Russell (Dalby) recalls 'his affection for Jack Duggan, Minister for Railways and later Leader of the Opposition after Labor's defeat in 1957'. Chalk and Duggan and their respective wives were also friendly. After parliament adjourned, the gregarious Chalk would sometimes buy a beer for his opponents. With Bjelke-Petersen ascendant, the camaraderie of parliament evaporated. Because of the paucity of committees, there was little opportunity for friendships made in that context to flourish, as they did in the Parliamentary Criminal Justice Committee (PCJC) during the first Goss government (1989–1992). Bill Gunn recalls friendships with Peter Beattie and Margaret Woodgate which extended to drinks in the evening. National Party parliamentarians were forbidden by the Premier to drink or dine with members of the opposition, but some of the more gregarious, or independent,
Nationals ignored the ban. Bill Gunn says that he often went and sat with Labor members in the dining room, and Allen Callaghan was friendly with Labor counterparts Greg Chamberlin and Jack Stanaway.\textsuperscript{34} In itself, such segregation may not have mattered. The British Parliament functioned in much the same manner, although it was eight times larger. In Queensland, however, what happened in the dining room was translated to the parliament. There was little chance that the Opposition, denied legitimacy, adequate staffing levels and resources, could enforce accountability.

Liberal Ginger Grouper John Murray claimed that ‘no parliament in Australia set out more deliberately to prevent the opposition doing its job’.\textsuperscript{35} Oppositions rely, to a great extent, on parliamentary mechanisms to keep them informed, but parliament in Queensland was woefully inadequate. Bjelke-Petersen refused to accord the Opposition, or indeed the government backbench, any recognition.\textsuperscript{36} Labor had not been generous to his party when it was in opposition and he reciprocated. His philosophy was to ignore the opposition: ‘Don’t promote the other fellow ... I never used to deal with my political opponents really and mention them. The less you mention them the better. Concentrate on yourself.’\textsuperscript{37} The taint of socialism, it seemed, put Labor beyond the pale, so that he never saw them as a potential alternative government. They remained, tautologically, ‘Her Majesty’s defeated opposition’.\textsuperscript{38} In his retirement, after experiencing the Fitzgerald Inquiry and his own trial for perjury in 1991, he told a journalist that he ‘used to think the Labor party were the lowest form of human activity’.\textsuperscript{39} But at this point they rose one notch in his estimation, to be replaced at the bottom by the legal profession.

The Leader of the Opposition was provided with a private secretary, a press secretary, three clerk-typists and a chauffeur/general assistant. The Deputy Leader had a research assistant. For many years opposition offices were a kilometre and a half away from Parliament House. The 1979 decision to upgrade opposition facilities was taken in Bjelke-Petersen’s absence by the Acting Premier, Llew Edwards, and the parliamentary chairman of committees. On his return Bjelke-Petersen was reportedly angered by this concession.\textsuperscript{40} It did not, however, amount to a great deal. The Opposition leader’s space in the parliamentary annexe was the same as a backbencher’s, a room four
metres by three metres, with a desk, three chairs and a wash basin. There was no access to the government plane. Tom Burns asked, in 1974, if he could join the Premier on a visit to bushfire-ravaged regions in the south-west corner of Queensland, but was refused. Opposition leaders were funded for travel on scheduled airline services, which was a considerable handicap during election campaigns. On election eve Labor was allocated the smallest room in the tally room. Bjelke-Petersen's strategy of denying the Opposition legitimacy was all-encompassing. For example, neither Labor nor Liberal MPs were present on the dais at the opening of the new parliamentary annexe and the Queensland delegation to the 1983 constitutional convention in Adelaide comprised nine government members and only three from the Opposition. This was contrary to the tradition of sending equal numbers from the major political parties. In no other state was the Opposition treated so parsimoniously.

A strong Opposition may have surmounted these problems, but the ALP in Queensland struggled for many years to overcome the impact of the 1957 split and the subsequent loss of office. From this point it slid downhill, after a brief revival in 1972, to the nadir of 1974 when it was reduced to 11 seats, its losses including the Townsville West seat of Perc Tucker, then party leader. Denis Murphy blamed Labor's demise on its too ready acceptance of the myth of Queensland difference, which, he argued, prevented Labor Party leaders from properly examining their own organisational structure and practices. Murphy's analysis is too charitable. Throughout the Bjelke-Petersen era the ALP was riven by factional hatreds, exposed to federal intervention, almost bankrupt and, until Wayne Goss, could not find a leader who captured the public imagination as did Bjelke-Petersen. Opposition was largely left, by default, to the churches, civil libertarians, unionists, and other concerned groups and individuals, all of whom made easy targets for the government, lacking as they did the umbrella of an effective parliamentary opposition and, it might be added, widespread public support.

Despite his loathing of the ALP and its supposed socialism, Bjelke-Petersen was not averse to doing deals with his opponents. When it suited his purposes, pragmatism overrode principle. There is evidence
that in 1980 Bjelke-Petersen concluded a secret electoral pact with Labor to disadvantage the Liberals.\textsuperscript{48} Seven years later he turned to Labor again, in a last-ditch effort to preserve his premiership. On this occasion Sir Edward Lyons acted as a go-between, setting up a meeting between Bjelke-Petersen and Peter Beattie, then State Secretary of the ALP.\textsuperscript{49}

Denied legitimacy, the Labor Party struggled to hold Bjelke-Petersen to account. As was the case with the Liberal backbenchers when in coalition, any blows Labor struck were easily deflected. The federal government, outside Bjelke-Petersen's control, was much harder to contend with, but it, too, learnt to tread cautiously in dealing with Queensland.

Just as a prime minister must accommodate to the constitutional rights and political realities of a federal system, so must a premier, however much s/he might like to act as the head of an autonomous state. This was always difficult for Bjelke-Petersen, who required ideological and personal autonomy. Given this, it was inevitable that he would clash with Gough Whitlam and in a less celebrated way with Malcolm Fraser. With the Labor prime minister there were two reasons for his antipathy: opposition to socialism and hostility towards someone who would constrain him. Bjelke-Petersen likened Whitlam to a 'feudal lord',\textsuperscript{50} an analogy which suggests that Bjelke-Petersen occasionally felt like a vassal. It was inevitable that such a feeling would provoke hostility.

All state premiers were wary of Whitlam's 'centralism' and resentful of his government's use of 'tied' grants, but Bjelke-Petersen's stance of permanent opposition was extreme. So persistent were his attacks that 'Queenslandism', defined by academic Margaret Cribb as 'the continuous opposition of the premier to almost every domestic and international policy of the federal Labor Government',\textsuperscript{51} became the leitmotif of this period. In announcing the 1974 state election, he said that it would be fought on 'the alien and stagnating, centralist, socialist, communist-inspired policies of the federal Labor Government'.\textsuperscript{52} As Treasurer, Gordon Chalk was willing to deal with the federal government and accept what benefits he could. Similarly, Eric Robinson, State President of the Liberal Party, called on Bjelke-Petersen to moderate his antipathy towards Labor.\textsuperscript{53}
however, was unmoved and remained determined to thwart Whitlam’s reform agenda despite the Labor government’s generous funding of projects like the Ross River Dam, the Julius Dam, beef cattle roads, irrigation, public hospitals and Aboriginal housing, health and education.\textsuperscript{54}

During the Whitlam era the Premier fuelled the Bjelke-Petersen mythology with a series of unexpected manoeuvres that appeared to trounce Whitlam and reinforce the Premier’s reputation for political cunning. In his attacks, Bjelke-Petersen appealed to the notion of Queensland difference and tapped into the rich vein of anti-intellectualism present in his state. Of most significance were the 1974 ‘Gair affair’\textsuperscript{55} and Bjelke-Petersen’s 1975 successful proposal that Albert Patrick Field replace the late Labor senator Bert Millner,\textsuperscript{56} thus giving the federal opposition the majority it needed to defer consideration of Labor’s budget. Both incidents involved a disregard for political convention and probity, but also created the impression in Queensland that Whitlam had been outsmarted by Bjelke-Petersen and his advisers.\textsuperscript{57} His success in damaging the Labor government undoubtedly added to his confidence and belief in the righteousness of his cause, a view reinforced by Labor’s loss of government in 1975.

Malcolm Fraser, whose ‘new federalism’ initially had been enthusiastically endorsed by Bjelke-Petersen, fared little better. While the two were theoretically on the same ideological side, Fraser was a strong man who threatened Bjelke-Petersen’s autonomy. He also eschewed populist politics. As one official said: ‘Fraser saw himself playing by the rules, whereas Joh and Court [premier of Western Australia] never played by the rules.’\textsuperscript{58} In addition, under Fraser and Whitlam many federal programs, especially in the social welfare area, were innovative. Queensland public servants, used to a paternalistic model, were unable to fully use funds for programs that were unfamiliar to them.\textsuperscript{59} In 1977 Bjelke-Petersen suggested that Queensland ‘could go it alone’, presumably giving him the autonomy he craved and leaving him free from interference from Canberra.\textsuperscript{60}

Despite the difficulties, Fraser tried to please Bjelke-Petersen in order to obtain agreement, only to find that the Queensland premier would renege. In another context, Ahern remarked that Bjelke-Petersen ‘never honoured any deal’.\textsuperscript{61} In these situations Fraser relied
on Peter Nixon, Hinze or Sparks to be intermediaries in what would invariably be protracted negotiations, such as the issue of the border between Australia and Papua New Guinea and the Queensland government’s 1978 decision to remove the Aurukun and Mornington Island settlements from the Uniting Church, to place them under the control of the state government. There were further Commonwealth–state clashes over the issue of the boundary of the Great Barrier Reef marine park and the sand mining of Fraser Island. Despite the mediation of Sparks and Edwards over the Great Barrier Reef, Bjelke-Petersen refused to compromise, declaring a ‘political war’ against Fraser.

Fraser, on the other hand, was prepared to compromise, and the federal government often backed away from overriding its state counterpart.

Bob Hawke, like Fraser, had no desire to repeat Whitlam’s experiences in dealing with Bjelke-Petersen. When the Hawke Labor government was elected, Bjelke-Petersen once again portrayed himself as a defender of states’ rights against the depredations of a ‘socialist’ government in Canberra. Hawke’s union background undoubtedly gave a fillip to Bjelke-Petersen’s antipathy. Hawke, however, was a consensus politician and something of a populist himself, so the edge of Bjelke-Petersen’s antagonism was blunted. His opposition to Hawke never achieved the *cause célèbre* status of his joustings with Whitlam, as the 1987 failure of the ‘Job for Canberra’ campaign was to demonstrate.

Bjelke-Petersen could not ignore the constraints of federalism, nor override prime ministers as he did opponents within state boundaries. He could, however, marshall support within Queensland in opposition to interventionist socialist or southern forces. In the case of Whitlam, he struck some damaging blows to a government already weakened by internal disarray and operating in a hostile economic and political climate. Prime ministers Fraser and Hawke were wary in their dealings with him, not wanting to arouse the states’ rights fervour, never far from the surface in Queensland.

Eventually hubris drove Bjelke-Petersen to seek the place in federal politics held by Whitlam, Fraser and Hawke. As an earlier chapter indicated, this was an impossible dream which precipitated the collapse of his premiership. He had made the long transition from
diffident beginner to a state premier who, eventually, faced no meaningful opposition. Cabinet was compliant, parliament ineffective, potential rivals powerless, and government policy reflective of his wishes. A steady stream of accusations of conflict of interest, impropriety and breaches of civil liberties failed to prevent his re-election on seven occasions. At each election a skilful campaign would point to Queensland's booming economy and the Premier's commitment to state development. All other considerations were either subordinated to these themes, or skilfully managed by the National Party to prevent them impinging on the main electoral game. Thus did Queensland elections from 1969 to 1986 routinely confirm Bjelke-Petersen and his government in power.

Notes
5. ibid., p. 19.
8. ibid.
10. Morrison, op. cit., p. 278.
11. C. A. Hughes, *The Government of Queensland*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1980, p. 120.
27. ibid., p. 63.
28. Mike Ahern, quoted in Reynolds, op. cit., p. 42.
32. Ahern, in Reynolds, op. cit., p. 17.
36. Reynolds, op. cit.
39. Quoted in H. Brown, 'Out of Exile', *Courier-Mail*. At this point in his life, he saw 'legal people' as 'the worst of all'.
41. Charlton, op. cit., p. 91.
42. ibid., p. 97.
52. Quoted in Lunn, op. cit., p. 200.
56. ibid., pp. 213–35.
60. See Lunn, op. cit., p. 257.
CHAPTER 11

THE PREMIER AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

At its heart, Queensland politics was ‘the politics of development, concerned with things and places, rather than people and ideas’. One source indicates that within a broad developmentalist framework, ‘Bjelke-Petersen lets the administration get on with its job unless he wants a special interest represented: then he intervenes and usually gets his way’. The former premier confirms that this was the case, saying: ‘I didn’t interfere a great deal.’ Intervention on behalf of special interests, however, led to politicisation of the public service, conflict of interest and downright corruption. As his premiership progressed, and his government became more entrenched, Bjelke-Petersen became increasingly absolutist in his identification of himself with the state. The leadership style he had shown in relationship to the party organisation, cabinet and parliament was reproduced in his relations with the bureaucracy. At first, he heeded his advisers, but as his confidence grew his wishes became government policy and the usual, albeit limited, checks and balances of party organisation, parliament, coalition partner and senior bureaucrats gave way to the advice of self-interested flatterers like Lewis and Lyons.

Where mastery of the physical environment is part of the basic cultural orientation, it is likely that government will be expected to be an active agent in the process. All Queensland governments had been interventionist in support of state development and Bjelke-Petersen’s was no exception. When Hugh Bingham joined Bjelke-
Petersen’s staff, he asked the Premier what his visions and ambitions for the premiership were. The response was, ‘progress, Hugh, progress’. This was a virtually unquestioned priority entrenched in the state’s political culture. Local members appealed for votes with promises of dams, schools and bridges and were judged more often by their lobbying prowess than their views. Correct bureaucratic procedures regulating tenders and contracts were bracketed with parliamentary and constitutional constraints as impediments to getting things done.

As well as the historical reasons for supporting state development, Bjelke-Petersen also understood that the success of his own leadership was inextricably linked with the economic growth of the state. An apparently booming economy would secure his re-election and increase his power in relation to the rest of Australia. It might also permit him to ‘go it alone’, or, alternatively, as the politician most closely identified with such a prosperous state, he could step forward to ensure similar progress at the national level. Support for progress had another dimension. It allowed Bjelke-Petersen and the National Party to foster business loyalty through government funding and legislation favourable to business entrepreneurs. The prioritisation of economic development meant that other issues, not directly associated with wealth creation, were devalued. National Party member Claude Wharton, for example, argued against the introduction to parliament of a day set aside for Private Members grievances on the grounds that:

Things of the moment in this State are big things; for example, the economy of the State ... I come to this house to try to achieve something for the people I represent ... However there is no way in the world we can achieve anything by receiving a lot of whingers’ complaints ...

The equanimity with which the electorate greeted the steady trickle of reports of corruption and parliamentary neglect suggests that Wharton was not alone in his opinion. So long as Queensland appeared to prosper, politicisation of the public service, conflict of interest, the routinisation of corruption and the neglect of social services made few dents in Bjelke-Petersen’s staying power.

Bjelke-Petersen’s strong commitment to state investment in sup-
port of private enterprise had its origins in his own climb out of poverty, and a religious world view which prioritised personal responsibility. This background made it impossible for him to understand that the poor and disadvantaged were not individually to blame for their condition. He demonstrated that strain of Christian moralism observed among Americans with fundamentalist leanings, whereby economic life is looked to 'not just for its efficacy in producing goods and services but as a vast apparatus for moral discipline, of rewards for virtue and industry and punishments for vice and indolence'. The economic policies that Bjelke-Petersen favoured, such as flat tax and government support for private investors, including charlatans like Brych and Oskar, favoured the rich (and industrious) over the poor (and indolent).

Economic development became his government's first priority and fuelled his virulent anti-socialism because socialism, in his mind, was antithetical to economic progress. The latter eclipsed all other considerations, such as concern for heritage and the environment, Aboriginal land rights, equitable and democratic public administration and any checks and balances that might impede 'progress'. Inevitably, state development became entwined with states' rights when the federal government failed to share Bjelke-Petersen's enthusiasm for sand mining on Fraser Island, or drilling for oil on the Great Barrier Reef. Domestic critics were less welcome than the foreign investors whom Bjelke-Petersen courted. Big transnational corporations prized the 'stability' of the Bjelke-Petersen regime as well as finding its anti-unionism and 'frontier capitalist' flavour appealing. There was a high proportion of non-Queensland ownership and control of the state's resources. Mining, in particular, was more closely tied to foreign capital than other sectors of the Australian economy. Because the Queensland government was keen to attract overseas investment, many of the large infrastructure costs were met by the state government, as well as by some mining companies, despite the free market rhetoric that Bjelke-Petersen and his ministers employed.

Property development in the state also became increasingly reliant on government backing. An example was Mike Gore's Sanctuary Cove development, which was treated very generously by the government with the passage of a special Act of Parliament dealing with the resort and the construction of two bridges at a cost of $6 million
linking the development area to the Gold Coast. In a speech at the opening of one stage of the development, Gore made clear the nature of the transaction. He thanked Russ Hinze for providing 'a shoulder to lean on' and promised the Premier, 'I know I have much more to give and you will have it while I live.' The government also proved willing to overrule local councils in favour of developers, as it did with the Toowong Railway Station development which did not conform to Brisbane City Council planning requirements. Objectors were accused of being 'anti-development'.

Like other developmentalists, Bjelke-Petersen's government assumed that wealth created by resource development produced a trickle-down effect, although this faith was never tested by benefit-cost analysis. During election campaigns the employment-creating potential of projects such as Norwich Park, Gregory and German Creek was stressed. One consequence of the untested conviction that wealth from such projects would flow throughout the community was the neglect of welfare and other social services. This was exacerbated by the state's low tax base which was a source of great pride to Bjelke-Petersen but contributed to the relatively low levels of per-capita expenditure on health, education, welfare, and law and order. In the areas of policing and health, for example, Queensland's per-capita expenditure did not approach those of the other states despite Queensland's more favourable treatment by the Commonwealth Grants Commission. The Commission estimated that Queensland could add $800 million to its budget if it adopted taxes and charges common to other states. The 1975 Poverty Commission reported Queensland as the state with the highest percentage of very poor adult income units, yet Queensland's per-capita expenditure on welfare services was considerably less than that of the other states. In 1980–81 Queensland spent 20 per cent less than the six state average on child welfare and 60 per cent less on aged care. Such welfare services as there were conformed to a residual, paternalistic model, based on the premise that an individual's needs should be met by the market and the family.

Despite Bjelke-Petersen's market rhetoric and his government's neglect of social services, he was not, in practice, an exponent of small government nor of a deregulated market. In addition to the support
offered to private investors, there were a plethora of agricultural marketing authorities, the State Government Insurance Office was transformed into Suncorp, a large shareholder in most of Brisbane’s listed companies, and the Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation was rumoured to be the nation’s second biggest marketer of packaged holidays. Throughout his premiership the state public service often enjoyed annual growth rates well in excess of population and labour force growth rates.

The Queensland Public Service during this era was an old-fashioned one, relatively untouched by the public service inquiries and managerialist reforms undertaken by the Commonwealth and other state jurisdictions. The Coalition government was so entrenched that there seemed no prospect of change, leading to cosy relations between government and the administration, and to the view that the Opposition was not an alternative government but an enemy to be kept at bay. In such a situation:

Public servants ... tend to give advice which supports predetermined policies. People who seek to enter the walls of the forbidden city, where politicians and bureaucrats live in harmonious control, are resented and treated as impertinent outsiders. The process of giving advice becomes incestuous. It is more about confirming opinions than challenging them. Research or new information, if it manages to penetrate at all, is rejected if it does not fit the rigid but unwritten agenda.

This suited Bjelke-Petersen but it did not make for effective administration. During his premiership the Queensland Public Service was characterised by centralised decision making, lack of planning, lack of inquiry and analysis into problems, and inadequate information with which confidently to make recommendations.

This pattern had been established by Labor, to the point where ‘the bureaucracy was a servant of the Labor party’. When the coalition took over in 1957, the Public Service continued to conform superficially to the Westminster model of a neutral career service, but continued, in practice, to be highly politicised at the senior levels. In addition, Bjelke-Petersen’s interventions on behalf of special interests meant that the predictability and equality of treatment associated with the traditional bureaucratic model were seriously compromised. As
the Bjelke-Petersen government became further entrenched, the boundaries between the public and the private blurred. It was not seen as untoward that cabinet ministers were provided with $1000 worth of tickets each for the Commonwealth games. Russ Hinze's Christmas parties, with abundant food and drink, all publicly funded, were legendary. Other ministers went further in confusing their own and the public's resources. Former ministers Don Lane, Brian Austin, Geoff Muntz and Leisha Harvey were all imprisoned for misappropriating public funds. Don Lane based his defence on the grounds that this was common practice. In an oblique fashion, the former premier confirmed Lane's assertion in a response to a question about the revelations of the Fitzgerald Inquiry:

... every member of parliament in Australia should be jailed for 50 years if they ... what's his name? Lane and Brian Austin, did these things for three or four thousand dollars. You wouldn't believe it but they do all sorts of things ... Everybody takes their family out to dinner in politics ...

He added that he believed that judges and the legal profession did the same.

Most public servants entered at the base grade and worked their way through the various levels till retirement. Academic qualifications were rare. Typical was Railway Commissioner Alby Lee, 'who started off on the railway platform and became Commissioner'. There was virtually no lateral recruitment and none at all at the level of permanent head of department or major sub-departments. When the Coalition took power, Labor appointments such as Sir David Longland and Sir David Muir remained, as did the practice of detailed administration from the top with limited delegation down the line.

Over time, however, as the Coalition consolidated its position, appointments at senior level became more partisan. Nominations were scrutinised by the premier and cabinet and, where there were doubts about loyalty to the Coalition, appointments were delayed or cancelled. By the mid-1980s the fastest track to the top was by means of one of the central agencies or service as a ministerial private secretary. Allen Callaghan's elevation from news and information officer to head of the Department of Tourism, National Parks, Sport
and Arts, and Bjelke-Petersen's former private secretary Stan Wilcox's rise to become Callaghan's deputy, were typical of this trajectory. Callaghan and his wife Judith, who administered the Queensland Day Committee, both succumbed to the tendency to confuse public and private resources and were jailed for misappropriating government money.

To external observers, Callaghan's downfall was part of an emerging pattern of corrupt government in Queensland but Bjelke-Petersen discounted this and insisted that his repeated re-election was proof of the people's trust and of the fact that accountability mechanisms were therefore superfluous. Economic progress and anti-communism remained the unquestioned, and, in his mind, related, twin pillars of his premiership. In prioritising economic progress, he was aided by the Queensland Treasury, which under the leadership of Sir Leo Hielscher shared his vision of state development.

Hielscher and the Co-Ordinator General, Sir Sydney Schubert, belonged to Bjelke-Petersen's 'kitchen cabinet', advising him on a range of issues which extended beyond economic matters. As did Sir Robert Sparkes, they kept him grounded in reality, but along with Sparkes they were eventually eclipsed by Sir Edward Lyons and the 'Joh for PM' group. By 1987 Bjelke-Petersen was Treasurer, and, without the Liberals to act as political scapegoats, as workhorses in politically difficult portfolios and as deliverers of the middle class vote, the Nationals came under increasing pressure over their management of the economy. Criticism even came from within their own ranks, when, at the time of the Lindeman Island affair, National Party trustee Sir Roderick Proctor accused the government of cronyism in its tendering practices.

Until the mining boom of the 1960s, Queensland had been a poor state. Governments of all complexions traditionally had been frugal, with a balanced budget assuming almost totemic significance. In an environment where farmers, small business people and others were forced to balance their domestic budgets, deficit spending would have been a huge electoral liability and an affront to those who have been raised, or forced by circumstances, to live abstemious, thrifty, prudent lives. Some economists threw doubt on whether or not Queensland's budget was, in fact, balanced, pointing to high levels of public
debt. Bjelke-Petersen would not divulge the actual figures, but the investment house Salomon Brothers estimated that public debt in Queensland was growing at a faster rate than in all other states except Western Australia. In 1983 the Australian Bureau of Statistics released figures that showed that Queensland had the highest budget deficit of all the states in both absolute and relative terms and the second highest in the rate of increase in its budget taxes. Bjelke-Petersen and his critics continued to produce conflicting statistics on these and other economic indicators, but as far as electoral politics were concerned Bjelke-Petersen relied on the tried and true formula of more development, fewer taxes and a balanced budget.

Despite the stagnation of the public service as a whole, there was a long tradition in Queensland of competent senior public servants and, as a minister, Bjelke-Petersen had been guided by Sir David Longland, Sir David Muir and Keith Spann. During his premiership the most powerful public servants were the Co-Ordinator General and later permanent head of the Premier’s Department, Sir Sydney Schubert, and the head of Treasury, Sir Leo Hielscher.

Hielscher joined the Queensland Public Service as a sixteen-year-old, subsequently obtaining tertiary qualifications in commerce and accountancy and being awarded, in 1972, an Eisenhower Fellowship to the United States. He held the post of Under Treasurer from 1974 to 1988, having been Deputy Under Treasurer for ten years prior to 1974. He was closely involved in resources policy and was highly regarded as a tough negotiator whose approach was ‘more that of a corporation negotiator than of a public servant’. Ken Wiltshire rated him as ‘one of the most informed and effective public servants in Australia’. Under Hielscher, Treasury ‘became king pin’, and as its power grew, so too did the influence of the Treasurer who, until 1983, was the Parliamentary Liberal Party leader and hence Deputy Premier. The Treasury portfolio was a key item in the coalition agreement and explains why Bjelke-Petersen immediately assumed the portfolio when he broke the agreement in 1983 following White’s elevation to the Liberal leadership.

Hielscher saw one of his principal tasks as ‘tactically positioning Treasury in the scheme of things’. He acknowledges that most of the Treasurers he served did not know much about finance, but he is
quick to praise Sir Thomas Hiley and Sir Gordon Chalk. Hiley, he says, was a brilliant man whose personal stamp on financial and economic policy was real. Chalk was ‘a wonderful fellow and good fighter, with animal cunning and a lot of streetwise pugnacious attitudes … his influence was tremendous but he was taking our point of view’.41

Hielscher shared the Premier’s prioritisation of development and his belief that the benefits would flow on to ordinary Queenslanders. One of his most successful policies, in conjunction with Chalk, was the insistence that mine development companies meet a series of infrastructure costs, such as the provision of township accommodation, services and regional roads for the project workforce and their dependants. They also insisted that the railway lines constructed for coal haulage be common carrier rather than being privately owned. Development companies had to meet the costs of railways by way of a security deposit. Providing the companies proceeded as planned and the specified quantities of coal were railed to port each year, the deposit monies plus interest were refunded. The government obtained the funds to meet these refunds from freight charges paid by the companies for the haulage of coal.42 Queensland was able to raise nearly $400 million annually through its charges on the transport of coal.43

Despite such successes, there was tension between Treasury and the rest of government which could be traced ‘right back to Chalk’s time’, a situation which Hielscher attributes to the negative, restraining role that Treasury played. Mike Ahern confirmed this opinion.44 With the Liberals’ departure and the end of the Coalition, this negative role fell to Bjelke-Petersen, adding one more component to the mix that was to bring about his political downfall. An additional factor was that Bjelke-Petersen did not have a good grasp of economics and ‘he didn’t hang in very long on any issue. I think his span was about three minutes. On economic issues it might have been two and a half minutes’.45 One mark of his leadership, however, which he had already demonstrated in other spheres, was the capacity to delegate. He ‘sorted out very quickly the people he could trust and who would supply him with the information which was needed and the people he could send away and not worry about’.46 Prior to becoming Treasurer,
Bjelke-Petersen relied on the Liberal treasurers, especially Chalk, to whom he played second fiddle at Loan Council meetings and Premier’s Conferences. In these forums, Queensland’s economic awakening was attributed to the Liberal treasurers, especially Chalk, and his ‘accurate, contained and conservative budgetary policy’. Don Dunstan recalls that at Loan Council meetings:

Bjelke-Petersen used to give forth with speeches which were not germane to the matters before the conference, and for most of the time when he was speaking people just used to look out of the window.

Sir Leo Hielscher is more charitable, saying of Premiers Conferences that ‘you haven’t got to be a real rocket scientist — they’re horse trading’. He says that Bjelke-Petersen knew what was going on because Treasury had told him. He does acknowledge, however, that if debate got away from what the Premier had been told, he was lost. If this happened, Chalk (or the current Treasurer) would intervene.

After 1983, when he became Treasurer, Bjelke-Petersen was deprived of this advice. He was aided by another economic novice, Bill Gunn. The work was divided between the two of them so that Treasury consulted with Bjelke-Petersen on policy and Gunn signed the official papers. Gunn also dealt with deputations, a task which Bjelke-Petersen disliked. On an issue like rail freights, he would summon Hielscher and Gunn and make an excuse to leave after five minutes. Gunn says: ‘Anyway, we would always tell him beforehand what we intended to do and he would be happy and satisfied with that.’

Treasury developed a system whereby policies were stripped of economic jargon before presentation to the Premier. One concept which Bjelke-Petersen embraced wholeheartedly was a Treasury proposal for a flat tax. The process involved in this proposition shows the ad hoc nature of policy making in Queensland. Hielscher recalls that, three weeks before the federal tax summit in 1985, they had no idea of what their approach was going to be. One of his staff approached him and said that they had been doing a few calculations and thought that a single-rate tax would work providing it was universally applied. The idea appealed to the Premier who took it to
the summit and adopted it as a major plank in his ‘Joh for Canberra’ campaign.

As Treasurer, Bjelke-Petersen continued his pattern of intermittent involvement in the policy process on behalf of special interests. In 1983 his old friend Ted Lyons contacted him seeking approval for the investment of TAB funds with Rothwells Ltd and other institutions. Lyons at the time was chairman of both the TAB and Rothwells. Leo Hielscher noted on the application, ‘Draft reply please. (It would be unwise for this investment to proceed.)’ There was further correspondence, but after Bjelke-Petersen’s intervention Rothwells was approved and the TAB invested in it. In retrospect, Hielscher sees Bjelke-Petersen’s greatest weakness as his quick friendships with charlatans:

He’d stick by them too until they were finally shown up. That was a serious weakness. That was a weakness we had to face as principal advisers to him quite a lot. We had to steer him away from them. This might also describe the people who were advising him to be prime minister.

Until this point Bjelke-Petersen had been able to rely on the state’s apparently booming economy and his government’s prudent economic management to convince Queenslanders that he should be repeatedly re-elected. Debate among economists and financial journalists about public debt or low levels of expenditure on health, welfare and education had little impact while the Premier could point to cranes on the skyline as a symbol of the state’s progress. He was ably supported by an Under Treasurer who shared his commitment to economic progress and by various Liberal treasurers who bore the brunt of resentment towards Treasury’s perceived negative role. As Treasurer, however, Bjelke-Petersen had to accept responsibility as well as revealing, on a more public stage, his limited grasp of economic principles. Further, his reliance on the advice of supporters without political or government experience led him to neglect the state’s governance in pursuit of federal office and to intervene in policy processes on behalf of these supporters or the interests they both represented and espoused.

Intervention on behalf of loyalists and in pursuit of opponents marked his entire premiership. He was a leader who demanded total
personal loyalty. In some instances, this demand extended to the lower ranks of the public service. Two schoolteachers who were unsuccessful as Labor candidates in the 1977 state election found that their teaching positions were no longer available to them. Their union was told that ‘the teachers got what they deserved for opposing the coalition and criticising its policies’. Former Country Party member, public servant and conservationist, John Sinclair, who had led the battle to stop sand mining on Fraser Island from his home town of Maryborough, was transferred to Ipswich and subsequently bankrupted by Bjelke-Petersen’s relentless pursuit of him in various court actions. Bjelke-Petersen’s suspicion of outsiders extended to interstate recruits to the public service, who lost all prior entitlements upon relocating. Queensland was the only state not to grant reciprocity on such matters, but Bjelke-Petersen felt that people should be prepared to make sacrifices in order to avail themselves of the benefits of working in Queensland.

Other interventions in public policy occurred when he wanted to enforce a policy about which he felt strongly or at the behest of special interests who sought financial advantage or the achievement of particular social goals. Sometimes he interceded just to do someone a favour, showing no understanding of bureaucratic regulations designed to ensure predictability and equality of treatment. Bill Hewitt gave an example:

If a constituent had been a good supporter of Joh and went to him and said: ‘Look, my daughter has been transferred to Birdsville State School. That’s horrible. Joh, what can you do about it?’ I don’t think he would see anything wrong in giving a directive, ‘Don’t send that girl out there.’

On one occasion a caller on talk-back radio, who complained that her husband had lost his job as a result of the contracting out of road works to private firms, was assured by Bjelke-Petersen that the problem would be fixed if her husband phoned him. This sort of random intervention resulted in the arbitrary and intermittent politicisation of what had previously been fairly routine departmental issues.

Bjelke-Petersen’s intercession on behalf of the pressure groups STOP and CARE, in their campaigns against curriculum materials
SEMP and MACOS, further demonstrated the lengths to which he would go in imposing personal judgments on government departments. These groups also received support in their agitation to ban a series of 'unsuitable' books from school libraries, among which were *To Kill a Mockingbird, Black Like Me* and *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. A booklet dealing with uranium mining, approved by both mining companies and conservationists, was banned, as was a film dealing with the dangers of drink driving, because it used a colloquialism for drunkenness.

Although the banning of SEMP and MACOS was heavily criticised by the educated elite, Bjelke-Petersen appealed through the rural press to his supporters’ anti-intellectualism, dislike of southerners and grassroots sentiments. He told readers that SEMP was 'the second dubious social studies course which Cabinet has had to stop in the interests of wholesome and genuine education for Queensland children'. He managed a swipe at the Whitlam government even though it had been out of office for over two years:

Many have been disturbed [sic] that SEMP enjoyed federal funding, but from past experience, I have found that many strange things arise in Canberra, especially if they were percolated during the Whitlam era.

Finally, he acknowledged his government’s mandate ‘to carry out the will of the people’ and made an oblique threat that ‘those in education who do not understand this fact of life, should quickly reassess their duties as servants of the Crown’. A press release on SEMP and MACOS which was sent to the *Sunday Mail* by Allen Callaghan, and published with little alteration, further appealed to the anti-elitist, pragmatic and anti-intellectual sentiments of Queenslanders. In statements attributed to the Premier, fears were raised that education ‘was not fitting their children for the real world’. In advocating technical training, the Premier was quoted as saying: ‘The notion that children should be allowed to do their own thing and be turned out as little liberal arts graduates must go.’ Teachers who defied the government’s authority were threatened with the sack and reminded that there were 700 unemployed teachers in Queensland ‘plus Bill Wood’ (a reference to one of the teachers who had stood unsuccessfully for Labor).
The confrontationist approach continued when, five years later, in 1982, teachers went on strike over class sizes. Bjelke-Petersen threatened them with the sack, although the Solicitor General pointed out that the Premier was not legally entitled to sack striking teachers. Bill Gunn’s recollection of another of Bjelke-Petersen’s attempts to sack teachers demonstrates the latter’s disregard for due process, and the involvement of his wife, as a member of his ‘kitchen cabinet’, in the public policy process. The incident began when the Premier phoned Gunn, the then Education Minister, with instructions to sack 50 teachers who were ‘playing up’. An alarmed Gunn refused, but defused the situation with a quick phone call to Florence Bjelke-Petersen. The episode was resolved happily but not before some ‘Dad Rudd MP’ qualities emerged:

... I rang Florence and said: ‘Hey, listen ... where’s Joh?’
‘He’s down the paddock, you can talk up’, she said. ‘It’s OK.’
I said: ‘Look, he’ll make a martyr out of all those. You can’t sack 50 teachers like that from that particular area just over a thing like that ... Anyway, she said: ‘No way. Who’s been advising him on that?’

Florence assured Gunn that she would have a talk to her husband and also suggested that he solicit the aid of a school principal on the Sunshine Coast who was the Premier’s ‘white-haired girl’. The tactic was successful and Bjelke-Petersen did not pursue the matter. On another occasion Florence Bjelke-Petersen used pumpkin-scone diplomacy to intervene in an Ipswich miners’ strike over the closure of their mine. She visited the site with a batch of scones, talked to the workers and persuaded her husband not to close the mine.

If relations with teachers were marked by discord, those with loyal members of the Queensland Police Force could not have been closer. In no other area of public administration was the relationship between loyalty to Bjelke-Petersen and reward more closely demonstrated. Rewards came in the form of pay and conditions, promotion, and, most significantly, turning a blind eye to corruption. Although the politicisation of the police force was a hallmark of the Bjelke-Petersen government, members of the force in Queensland had traditionally shown allegiance to whomever was in power. In 1963 Labor member of parliament Colin Bennett QC alleged that leading
police officers, including Commissioner Frank Bischoff, travelled to country areas to support the government during election campaigns. In the Bischoff era ‘in some respects police corruption had acquired a quaint quasi-legitimacy and reached to the top. Although Bischoff’s corruption was known to the then premier, Sir Frank Nicklin, and his Police Minister, Jack Pizzey, Bischoff remained as Commissioner and Nicklin retained his reputation for probity.

Considering his socialisation in such an environment, it is unsurprising that Bjelke-Petersen demonstrated no understanding that the obligations of a police force were to the community and the law rather than to the government of the day. When he, in turn, became premier, turning a blind eye to corruption was the price he was prepared to pay in order to have a force he could rely on to implement the government policy on, among other things, the contentious street-march issue. Always willing to increase police powers, he remained reluctant to investigate the steady stream of allegations of police corruption. On the occasions when public pressure forced investigations into corruption and abuse of police powers, he refused to make the findings public.

Initially, Bjelke-Petersen appeared intimidated by Bischoff, perhaps recognising the depth of police power in Queensland. Hugh Bingham recalls that he wrote a script for the Premier to follow when the latter rang Bischoff on the unpopular issue of police radar traps, reminding him, ‘You’re the boss, Joh’. Bjelke-Petersen recognised the political importance of the police, opting to retain the police portfolio for the first year of his premiership. In the case of police promotions, cabinet reserved the right to scrutinise appointments down to senior sergeant level, ensuring that loyalty was rewarded. Allen Callaghan reinforced Bjelke-Petersen’s inclinations in this direction by advising him to look after the police ‘for when the crunch comes’. This his government did, providing police with outstanding retirement and superannuation benefits. When Bjelke-Petersen travelled, the first people he spoke to when he got off his plane were the police who were always present to greet him. These men, who were usually ignored by other politicians, appreciated the gesture, just as they appreciated his support against the reformist Police Commissioner Ray Whitrod.
Accounts of Whitrod’s personality suggest that it was inevitable that he and Bjelke-Petersen would have little rapport. According to Whitrod, the Premier ‘treated me as though I were another of his clerks, there to carry out his instructions while not impeding his plans’. Whitrod was not equipped for this role. His own style has been described as that of ‘an autocrat in a hurry’. He was articulate, forceful and well educated, with a Bachelor of Economics degree and a postgraduate Diploma of Criminology from Cambridge. He was also an outsider, from South Australia, and had served as Commissioner in the Northern Territory and New Guinea. His attempts to reform the Queensland Police Force brought him into conflict with the Police Union, which, at a meeting after the Springbok tour, passed a unanimous vote of confidence in Bjelke-Petersen before successfully passing a vote of no confidence in Whitrod. Bjelke-Petersen’s attitude towards reform, especially the recommendation for further educational requirements for police promotion, reflected that of the ordinary member of the force rather than the educated elite represented by Whitrod. Whitrod was supported in his attempts to upgrade police qualifications by Max Hodges who had succeeded Bjelke-Petersen as Police Minister in 1969, but the Premier overruled them both, referring to his long-held belief that ‘you can’t beat experience’. The Police Union correctly pointed out that Queensland cabinet ministers were no better educated than the average policeman.

In a further demonstration of his confrontationist leadership style and his technique for ensuring the support of the rank and file, Bjelke-Petersen also rejected Whitrod’s and Hodges’ recommendation for an inquiry into police behaviour during a protest march in mid-1976 when a student was struck by a police baton. Bjelke-Petersen informed Whitrod that cabinet, not the Commissioner, would decide if an investigation was warranted, for which he received a letter from the Police Union thanking him and pledging its support. Such support eventually extended to the government’s payment of the legal costs of a police officer defending a charge that arose out of a demonstration. Soon after the baton incident, Hodges was replaced as Police Minister by Tom Newbury. According to one close observer, Bjelke-Petersen’s stand was part of a deliberate strategy
to win the support of the police. Support was soon forthcoming, with Brisbane Traffic Branch police passing a motion commending the Premier for ‘his distinct stand against groups acting outside the law’ and censuring Whitrod.

The police, secure in the knowledge that they had the Premier’s backing, continued to act provocatively, most notably during a raid on a commune at Cedar Bay in North Queensland. In October 1976 police and customs officers, while searching for cannabis, torched houses and destroyed residents’ belongings. Whitrod ordered an inquiry but the resulting report was never made public and charges resulting from the incident were unsuccessful. There was no parliamentary debate on the topic because, fortuitously for the Bjelke-Petersen government, one of the policemen involved issued a Supreme Court writ claiming he had been defamed in a television report of the incident. The Speaker ruled against debate because the matter was sub judice. Once again the Police Union conveyed its thanks to the Premier.

Three months after the Cedar Bay raid, Whitrod resigned after seven years as Commissioner, saying that he could no longer tolerate political interference and that the position of Police Commissioner had become that of a political puppet. Whitrod felt that under Bjelke-Petersen he was no longer in command of the force that he headed. For his part, Bjelke-Petersen, never one to compromise, expected acquiescence once he had made his opinion known. When Bjelke-Petersen failed to get compliance, he responded to Whitrod as to all other forceful personalities who had opposed him.

Terry Lewis, on the other hand, presented the face of an unquestioning loyalist. At the time of his appointment, Lewis was stationed at Charleville. His strategy for ingratiating himself with Bjelke-Petersen was similar to that of Ted Lyons. He met with Bjelke-Petersen when the latter travelled west, bombarded the Premier with letters singing his own praises and intimated that Whitrod had Labor connections. Another factor in his appeal to Bjelke-Petersen may have been that the Premier knew that Lewis was out of favour with Whitrod. Lewis’s appointment as the Assistant Commissioner, over 16 officers of higher rank and 106 of equal rank, was made despite opposition from Whitrod, who, in the circumstances, had no alterna-
tive but to resign. Lewis' was not the only unusual promotion. The police officer who had allegedly hit a student demonstrator with his baton was promoted to superintendent. The Police Officers' Association was satisfied with Lewis's appointment, although he had not been on the list that it had submitted to cabinet. Neither had he been on Whitrod's list. It is difficult to ascertain the precise details of his nomination because the only notes missing from cabinet over a period of many years relate to the meeting dealing with Lewis's extraordinary promotion.

The CIB section of the union sent Bjelke-Petersen a congratulatory telegram supporting Lewis's promotion, despite public murmurings that he had been a 'bagman' for corrupt former commissioner, Bischoff. Bjelke-Petersen has persistently denied that he knew anything about corruption but the evidence suggests that this is untrue. It is more likely that he chose to ignore the allegations in return for loyal and deferential service. The corruption allegations were discussed in cabinet and dismissed. Bill Gunn, who became Police Minister in 1983, confessed to 'having an inkling there was a problem with Lewis because of anonymous phone calls alleging corruption'. His secretary, Gwen Butler, who had previously worked for Max Hodges, also alerted him to a 'problem with corruption'. As Minister, Gunn was critical of Lewis for bringing forward cabinet briefs at the last minute and found the Police Commissioner reluctant to attend meetings as requested. Lewis also procrastinated when Gunn asked him to provide answers to a list of questions submitted by the Courier-Mail.

Despite his Deputy's concerns, Bjelke-Petersen remained deaf to allegations of corruption. He could hardly have been unaware of them, given that each of the publicly funded writs issued by members of his government against both their political opponents and media organisations concerned alleged corruption. Notwithstanding these proceedings, his protestations of ignorance continued. With the Fitzgerald Inquiry still sitting, he continued to insist that 'we had no suspicions at all', a denial he repeated a month later when giving evidence to the Inquiry. Others, however, cast doubt on these assertions. Vern MacDonald, a former deputy police commissioner, told the Inquiry that he had informed Sir Joh that it was general
police belief that Lewis had been a member of the ratpack who had been bagmen for Bischoff. In a conversation with the then premier about the need for a royal commission to look into the police force he remembers that Bjelke-Petersen looked at him and said, 'It's Terry, isn't it?' Lewis was later found guilty of corruption and received a sentence of 14 years imprisonment.

Bjelke-Petersen chose to ignore corruption because to acknowledge it was to hand a weapon to his political enemies. This is suggested by a remark he made when refusing to make public a Scotland Yard report into 'allegations of misconduct, malpractice and corruption in the Queensland Police Force'. One of the report's authors briefed the then Queensland Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Bill Lickiss, when the latter was in London, warning him that corruption and sectarianism were rife in the Queensland Police Force and alerting him to the activities of a group of corrupt police known as the 'the rat pack'. Bjelke-Petersen refused to table the report, on the grounds that it would be misconstrued by opponents of the government and the police. Perhaps he believed that corruption was a lesser evil than socialism, or that turning a blind eye was a price worth paying for loyalty of the kind Lewis demonstrated when, in a speech at the Police Academy, he told those assembled that 'The people of Queensland and the police force owe the Premier a very deep gratitude'. Bjelke-Petersen returned the compliment, telling a radio interviewer: 'We have a very good police force ... I don't have to ring him [Lewis] up and tell him to do this or that.'

Bjelke-Petersen's leadership became progressively more authoritarian. Opposition to the government itself became suspect and, under Lewis, police involvement in politics escalated. Police sought a copy of a petition to the Brisbane City Council calling for public speaking to be allowed in the Brisbane City Mall on the grounds that it was their responsibility 'to watch closely the activities of suspected subversive and radical groups which could pose a threat'. Journalists covering industrial disputes and picketing were afraid of arrest, and in 1985 the Australian Journalists Association withdrew from the system for police passes for journalists because of police refusal to
accredit certain journalists. Other journalists and critics of the Bjelke-Petersen regime experienced police harassment. Even members of the Coalition were not exempt from police scrutiny. A Special Branch sergeant was asked ‘to find something on [Angus] Innes …’ The interference was not one-sided. Bjelke-Petersen would contact Lewis’s office directly if he wanted a matter pursued. For example, he directed an officer in Lewis’s office to investigate alleged breaches of the Electoral Act by Dr Denis Murphy, President of the Labor Party. Bjelke-Petersen also gave a member of Lewis’ staff advice on how to interrogate Keith Wright, the Leader of the Opposition, about allegations the latter made in July 1983 of corruption in the granting of a power station contract.

Lewis remained similarly unbound by conventions governing the relationship between government and senior police officers. He cultivated government contacts, especially Bjelke-Petersen, and he discussed police matters with Don Lane, despite the fact that Lane was never Police Minister. He also began meddling in political appointments, persuading Bjelke-Petersen to remove Russell Hinze, who had become Police Minister in 1980. Hinze became unsatisfactory to Lewis on a number of grounds, among them the establishment of the Police Complaints Tribunal. The Commissioner lobbied Bjelke-Petersen directly and also indirectly through Sir Edward Lyons, whom he went out of his way to cultivate and whom he accompanied to the America’s Cup yacht races in Perth. Bjelke-Petersen, after first checking with Lewis to see if the move was acceptable, appointed Bill Glasson in 1982 to the Police portfolio. Lewis also lobbied ministers on behalf of barrister and former police officer Eric Pratt and Crown Prosecutor, Angelo Vasta, regarding their appointments as Queen’s Counsel. Both achieved their goals. Pratt became chair of the Police Complaints Tribunal and a District Court judge. Vasta became a Supreme Court judge but was eventually removed from the bench by Parliament after an inquiry by three retired interstate judges, inaugurated by the Ahern government, found that he had deceived tax authorities and given false sworn evidence in a defamation case about his friendship with Terry Lewis. The Police Commissioner contacted Lyons on a number of occasions regarding his knighthood. He also spoke to Bjelke-Petersen about his likely
successor as premier and the next gubernatorial appointment. Lewis also ventured into areas removed from political patronage. It was revealed at the Fitzgerald Inquiry that he had raised electoral matters, including the 1985 redistribution, with Bjelke-Petersen, and with various ministers and Sir Edward Lyons. Lewis’s diaries reveal that between 1976 and 1987 he saw Bjelke-Petersen 134 times, and the Premier telephoned him 197 times.\textsuperscript{115}

Just as parliamentary convention meant nothing to Bjelke-Petersen, and indeed frequently appeared an impediment to ‘getting things done’, so conventions concerning relations between the government and its public servants were similarly abandoned. Bjelke-Petersen intervened in public policy on behalf of his own interests and at the behest of his friends, brushing off allegations of corruption in the police force and turning on the critics who dared to question his leadership. Neither critics nor allegations prevented Bjelke-Petersen from being re-elected and both were countered by a steady stream of reportage emphasising Queensland’s progress with Bjelke-Petersen at the helm.

Notes
10. Stuart, op. cit., p. 63.
12. Stuart, op. cit., p. 54.
17. ibid.
29. Hickey, op. cit., p. 35.
31. ibid.
33. Hofstadter, op. cit., p. 90.
34. Gittens, loc. cit.
37. Stuart, op. cit., p. 67.
41. ibid.
46. ibid.
48. ibid., p. 264.
50. ibid.
53. ibid., p. 98.
60. ibid., p. 5.
61. Quoted in A. Scott, ‘Education’ in Patience, op. cit., p. 136. The following quotations from this letter are also from this source.
64. Gunn, pers. comm., June 1997.
65. ibid.
69. Whitton, op. cit., p. 16.
72. Wiltshire, op. cit., p. 188.
74. ibid.
77. Procter, op. cit., p. 166.
81. ibid.
82. Lunn, Joh, p. 240.
83. ibid.
84. For a detailed account of this incident and its ramifications, see Lunn, ibid., pp. 236–54.
85. ibid., p. 243.
87. Lunn, Joh, p. 246.
88. Whitton, op. cit., p. 35.
91. ibid.
94. Whitton, op. cit., p. 38.
98. Dickie, 'Joh Man ...'.
100. Quoted in Whitton, op. cit., p. 160.
103. ibid.
105. Quoted in Whitton, op. cit., p. 84.
106. Quoted in Hawker, op. cit., p. 80.
110. Whitton, op. cit., p. 60.
111. ibid., p. 84.
112. ibid., p. 82.
114. Whitton, op. cit., p. 77.
CHAPTER 12

THE PREMIER, THE MEDIA
AND THE PEOPLE

BJELKE-PETERSEN treated the media with the same mix of characteristics that he employed in other arenas. He could be engaging, but he demanded total loyalty and was unforgiving and vindictive if reporting was not to his satisfaction. Just as he could conceive of no legitimate role for the Opposition, neither could he accept that the press had a legitimate role in making government accountable. The National Party managed his election campaigns and he, and the people he hired, managed the media almost as effectively as he had managed parliament and cabinet. As Huey Long, populist governor of Louisiana realised at the beginning of the mass communication age, effective communication is essential in generating the loyalty necessary to sustain a regime. Long said in 1929 that ‘a document prepared by me in the evening could be printed and placed on the porch of practically every home in the State of Louisiana during the morning of the following day’.1 Bjelke-Petersen, through his use of the state’s media, could have made a similar claim.

He was quick to punish members of the media who offended him, either by withdrawing government advertising, by denying interviews and, eventually, by issuing defamation writs. In 1986, confronted by escalating media criticism, he revealed the same intolerance he had shown to other critics, telling the Australian Financial Review: ‘the greatest thing that could happen to the state and the nation is when we get rid of the media. Then we would live in
peace and tranquillity and no one would know anything.' He had said much the same during the 1980 campaign. In retirement, he contrasted the Queensland and the national press, who, he believed, distorted news, with the media in Tasmania, who were ‘delightful, pleasant people. They print what you tell them’.

The authoritarianism thus revealed had long been acknowledged as a Bjelke-Petersen characteristic. Separate surveys conducted in 1977 on behalf of the National Party and the University of Queensland Sociology Department found that Bjelke-Petersen rated more highly than other party leaders, Tom Burns (Labor) and Bill Knox (Liberal), on ‘his ability as a politician, knowing how to handle his job, standing up for the interests of Queenslanders and the strength of his principles’, but he outpolled them on being dictatorial and scored below them on the degree to which respondents could believe what he said. More than half the National Party supporters polled by the Sociology Department, rather surprisingly, thought of him as a good speaker, although this opinion was not held to the same degree by Labor supporters. Being perceived as dictatorial and dishonest had no negative impact on his party’s electoral performance. One author observed that, in Queensland, to be considered dictatorial may be to be rated highly. Certainly, Labor polling showed that Bjelke-Petersen’s iron rule was linked in the public mind with stability, and strong leadership had long been admired and expected. Positive images, such as standing up for Queensland and getting things done, appeared to count for more than perceptions of dishonesty. Whereas, in other parts of Australia Bjelke-Petersen’s leadership was seen as authoritarian and corrupt, in his own state his identification with Queensland became a staple of National Party campaigns, most notably in 1986 when the National Party slogan was simply ‘Joh Queensland’. The two had become fused.

Despite, or possibly because of, his perceived failings, Bjelke-Petersen’s government was re-elected on seven occasions. Part of the reason for this was the appeal his leadership style held for electors, which, in turn, was linked with the way in which he and his government’s activities were reported. Under the direction of Robert Sparkes and especially Mike Evans, the National Party organisation had become increasingly sophisticated in its use of polling and in the
production of election campaign materials. These materials consisted of brochures containing details of candidates, newspaper advertisements, and television clips featuring Bjelke-Petersen. As a rule, both sides of his personality were displayed in these campaigns: the aggressive leader and the benevolent grandfather. In 1977 the campaign jingle reflected the results of market research linking as it did the person of the Premier with the future of the state, and subsequent campaigns picked up this theme as well. His final state campaign in 1986 ran on the theme ‘Nationals. There’s never been a greater need’ and promised ‘Strength — not weakness, Decisions — not summits, [and recalling the bitter 1985 SEQEB dispute] Obedience to the law — not union anarchy’. Bjelke-Petersen himself said that ‘you can campaign on anything you like, but nothing is more effective than communism’.

Bjelke-Petersen took his message to the remotest parts of the state, ignoring critics who constantly questioned the use of the government jet for party political purposes. He had a system for ensuring that he visited every part of Queensland. Once a place had been visited, coloured pins were stuck in a map on the wall of his private secretary’s office, green for one trip, blue for two trips and red for three or more. By the end of the year it was easy to see if any area had been neglected. In addition to the use of the government aircraft for political campaigning, the government also used its well-resourced public relations arm. In 1972 one government public relations officer announced, with no apparent dismay, that ‘We had three groups campaigning in this election — the Country and Liberal Parties, the ALP Opposition, and the Government, in its own right’.

As Bjelke-Petersen’s tenure in the premiership lengthened, Queenslanders’ interest in his pronouncements grew. This, of itself, was no different from what occurred in other polities where ‘the biggest name for comment is invariably the person at the centre of power’. In Queensland during the Bjelke-Petersen era this trend was especially marked, as the Opposition was treated badly by the press. Reporters sought reaction to Opposition press statements from the Premier before running them as newsworthy in their own right. For most of Bjelke-Petersen’s premiership, the state’s newspapers were supportive of the government. For example, on the street march issue
the majority of press reports and editorials supported the police and
the government. The state's most important newspaper, the Courier-
Mail, endorsed the return of a coalition government in every state
election between 1957 and 1986. In the last case, it subscribed to the
view that the Liberals were a moderating influence, despite the fact
that the Coalition had collapsed in August 1983 and the Nationals
had fought the 1983 and 1986 elections alone. Bjelke-Petersen
specifically ruled out any coalition with the Liberals on both occa-
sions.

It was not unusual for news organisations to publish press state-
ments released on behalf of the Premier even when he was absent.
From 1971 to 1978 these were issued by Allen Callaghan, who argued
that 'because I work with him, I know him, I can speak in his name'.
Callaghan was a former ABC journalist who became Bjelke-
Petersen's news and information officer, a title designed to give him
maximum scope and flexibility in the tasks he undertook. In this role
he worked closely with Stan Wilcox, the Premier's private secretary,
and Beryl Young, his pilot, a triumvirate that Callaghan feels were
good advisers, because of the checks and balances they offered. He
told the Premier, 'My greatest value is to tell you things you don't
want to hear.' When he and Wilcox left, the Premier 'only had
Beryl'.

Callaghan's predecessor had been Hugh Bingham who had tried
to soften Bjelke-Petersen's 'wowser' image and simplify his name to
'Joh Petersen', a move which the Premier disliked. At this stage
Bingham recognised that the Premier was on a steep learning curve,
but that he was persistent and unlikely to give up. Unlike Gough
Whitlam, who failed to rush to Darwin in the aftermath of Cyclone
Tracy, Bjelke-Petersen learnt the importance of the leader's presence
at the scene of natural disasters. When storms destroyed much of the
small southern Queensland town of Killarney, early in Bjelke-
Petersen's premiership, his initial reaction, consistent with his personal
philosophy of self-reliance, was to stay away, insisting that those
affected should have been insured. His media adviser persisted and
the Premier visited the town, with such success that Bingham says of
the Premier: 'He never forgot the Killarney lesson ... You only had
to have a little zephyr that blew the roof off and Joh would be there'.

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Bingham's management of the Queensland media was never as all-encompassing as Callaghan's proved to be, but, in order to bring the tyro Premier to the attention of both the public and *Courier-Mail* journalists, he bought columns one and two on page two of the *Truth* and began writing a column in the Premier's name. Bingham also travelled with the Premier and his party. In these early days of the premiership, journeys were made by train. Bingham was impressed by the way in which Bjelke-Petersen engaged country audiences with simple stories and by the friendliness which he and Florence displayed towards the travelling media contingent. The couple would appear in their dressing gowns 'and the blokes would be drinking stubbies and they would have a cup of tea'. The only ones who failed to warm to the Premier and his wife were the railway shunters at Rockhampton, who, on recognising the Premier's carriage, 'used to bash the cars all over the yards'.

When Callaghan took over, he defined his functions as being 'to promote the Government, promote the Premier and also to more or less be an intelligence service'. So successful was Callaghan that Gough Whitlam told a Queensland Press Club luncheon that he saw in Bjelke-Petersen 'the hand of Jacob in the hairy paw of Esau'. Gordon Chalk, who found himself and the Liberals sidelined by the Premier's media machine, concluded of Callaghan's activities 'that he was my undoing'. Callaghan was known variously as Kissinger, manipulator, hidden persuader and puppeteer. However, Callaghan is adamant that he 'didn't make Joh': 'I provided words and music but he was still a consummate politician.' Bjelke-Petersen, too, minimises Callaghan's role, but he has always been reluctant to acknowledge the contribution of others. The one point Bjelke-Petersen concedes is that Callaghan pointed out journalists, like Quentin Dempster, who he considered were negative and not worth wasting time with. Under Callaghan's tutelage, Bjelke-Petersen learned to make himself available to the media and to be himself — only more so. His home number was listed in the white pages, he handed out the number of his private office line 'like confetti' and he held daily press conferences. He was naturally courteous and friendly to those who were not his enemies. He always had calls routed directly to his office and Leo Hielscher recalls frequent interruptions. On one
occasion during discussions with the Under Treasurer, the Premier spent three minutes — the length of time he usually gave to policy — chatting to a caller who had dialled the wrong number.32

Bjelke-Petersen's ability to communicate with ordinary Queenslanders was part of his homespun charm. Callaghan recognised this when he insisted that Bjelke-Petersen remain himself even to the point of retaining his rambling style of communication. According to Callaghan, 'smooth talking is for toastmasters and confidence men'33 and, he might have added, the Premier's critics from the upper echelons of the churches, academe and federal politics. It seemed as if the more the well-educated scoffed, the greater the appeal of the Premier and his wife.34 Bjelke-Petersen's famously awkward speeches, where mistakes were sometimes greeted by cheering and applause,35 lend support to the proposition that small flaws, 'if slight and empathetic', bring a leader closer to ordinary people.36 His verbal stumbling communicated decent simplicity and trustworthiness and, in order to enhance his popular appeal, Bjelke-Petersen appears to have exaggerated, or at least not tried to rid himself of, his famous speaking style. When he negotiated in the international arena, he showed no signs of it.37 Nor did he in a retirement interview he gave author Bob Ellis.38 Peter Beattie, who says that he believes Bjelke-Petersen's incoherence was genuine, nevertheless observed that the Premier was 'coherent and relaxed' during negotiations in the dying days of the premiership.39 The rambling in response to media questioning had another function. It gave Bjelke-Petersen time to think of an answer, or to avoid giving one altogether.40

In addition to refining Bjelke-Petersen's interview techniques, Callaghan prepared parliamentary speeches and released a steady stream of press releases to the state's news media, timing them to coincide with the periods when news editors were most desperate for news. Often these were used without alteration. During Callaghan's tenure, the Premier was estimated to receive at least 20 per cent of all state political news in Queensland's daily press.41

Television was not neglected either. Bjelke-Petersen employed a cinematographer who travelled with him (at considerable public expense) both within Queensland and overseas. The resultant film clips of his exploits were then used by television news programs.42 In
the lead-up to the 1972 election, five-minute clips extolling state development and featuring the Premier, and sometimes his deputy, were broadcast on Brisbane commercial television. There was no way in which the Opposition could match these resources. By 1973 all ministers employed press secretaries who, unlike their Commonwealth counterparts, enjoyed the security of tenure of public servants and some of the highest pay rates in Australia. Allen Callaghan, however, recalls that initially there were some drawbacks, such as being expected to keep public service hours and sign a time book. He refused because ‘the media doesn’t work those hours’. Estimates of expenditure on salaries and related PR matters were virtually impossible to find.

Engaging as the Premier could be, he had shown in other areas of his life that he could be vindictive towards his critics, and he was no different in his treatment of the media. He banned a Courier-Mail journalist who had been critical of his excessive use of the government aircraft. The Australian Journalists Association retaliated with a ban on copy from the Premier’s office, but it was short-lived because so much Queensland news was focused on the Premier. Other journalists who wrote critical articles became the subject of rumour-mongering or were harassed by traffic police. In 1984, when Bjelke-Petersen perceived an anti-government bias in the Courier-Mail, he retaliated by removing the million-dollar government advertising account and placing it with the Daily Sun, which had commenced publication in 1982 and lasted ten years before folding. It became clear, however, that a situation of mutual need characterised Bjelke-Petersen’s relationship with the media. Neither, it seemed, could live without the other.

There were cultural and institutional reasons making Callaghan’s task easier than it might have been in other environments. There was limited competition among the news media in Queensland, a situation which in other contexts had affected the standards of journalism and the nature of newspaper content. What competition there was sometimes led to pettiness, where a story would not be used by one organisation if it had been broken by another, leaving some issues that were damaging to the government to die. This occurred in 1982 when the ABC’s Nationwide program interviewed police who re-
revealed the attempted cover-up of Sir Edward Lyons arrest for drink driving, and described corruption in the Queensland Police Force. Other media failed to follow-up the story.

For most of the premiership, the *Courier-Mail* was the only statewide morning newspaper. The *Telegraph* was the only afternoon paper. Both provided material to AAP which provided news to almost all commercial news organisations outside Brisbane. Within Brisbane, commercial radio and television also relied heavily on the AAP service, and ultimately on the *Courier-Mail*.

The lack of competition had another, more hidden, dimension. It meant that there were few career options available to journalists who wanted to live and work in Brisbane. The state government was second only to Queensland Newspapers as an employer of journalists. It was, and is, a common career path for journalists to move between government work and the media. As early as 1972, eight previous government roundsmen and press gallery reporters had taken government employment. In one instance, a reporter who had accepted a senior government position was still assigned to government rounds, even though his employer knew of his imminent departure. Many journalists may have been capable of wearing the two hats required, but the perception of compromise lingers, the perception that journalists hopeful of joining ministerial staff might be less probing than they would otherwise be. Similarly, journalists returning to newspapers or television after a period of government service might have absorbed a government 'line' and be overly reliant on government sources for their information. In one observer's opinion, 'there has been (and remains) a risk that members of the media might view themselves as part of the system, and not so much as observers of it'.

Even when journalists wanted to undertake investigative reporting, many complained that they were insufficiently funded. Chris Masters, whose *Four Corners* program was instrumental in finally bringing about an inquiry into corruption in Queensland, had three months to research and prepare the episode. Few, if any, in Queensland had those resources. Instead, reportage often substituted for investigative journalism, and the information contained in government press releases and handouts was often neither confirmed nor subjected to
critical evaluation before being used. Government ‘leaks’ to selected journalists secured favourable coverage for the government. ‘Leaks’ would dry up or be redirected if reporters failed to toe the line. Reporters considered reliable by the government would be given rebuttals of negative stories or ‘puff pieces’ that made controversial subjects like corrupt police look good.

Relatively small numbers of reporters were allocated to government rounds, and these were vastly outnumbered by government PR employees. In 1972, for example, the government round was normally occupied by no more than six people, supplemented by others when parliament was sitting:

Essentially, however, six men are expected to keep almost two million people informed of their State Government activities and decisions, from a city which boasts three metropolitan newspapers, four television stations, and six radio stations, plus agency and networking services for the provincial media of Australia’s most decentralised state.

According to another source, the *Courier-Mail* employed more food writers than finance or political writers. Further, the attitude was fostered by the government that to criticise anything other than the Labor Party was to be ‘un-Queensland, unpatriotic, and treacherous’.

Journalists, editors and producers were also quietened by Bjelke-Petersen’s increasing use of defamation actions in order to try ‘to stop talk about a corrupt Government’, and by his advice to potential critics to ‘stick to the truth and don’t say things that are wrong and you won’t have anything to worry about’. Although Queensland defamation laws appeared to be less inhibiting than such laws in some other states, the climate of opinion in Queensland was such that media self-censorship became the norm. Fourteen of the 24 actions launched by Bjelke-Petersen and his ministers were publicly funded. These included action taken against the then Leader of the Opposition, Nev Warburton, other Labor MPs, the general secretary of the Trades and Labour Council of Queensland, Ray Dempsey, and the ALP’s state secretary, Peter Beattie. John Moore, then State President of the Liberal Party and a federal MP, was sued for stating in 1986 that ‘corruption in Queensland appears to have become the
norm, rather than the exception’. In this instance, Bjelke-Petersen stated that he would pay for the defamation action himself.

The lack of an effective fourth estate added to the isolation from diverse ideas which flowed from regionalism, an economy dominated by agriculture and mining, low levels of education and a comparatively low incidence of migration from non-English-speaking sources. Although Queensland journalists did, from time to time, report allegations of corruption, these were invariably countered by a steady stream of positive news which emanated from Bjelke-Petersen’s office. This continued to identify the Premier with Queensland, development and stability, while tainting his opponents with communism, malevolence and subservience to outside forces, and instability. As an additional insurance against being defeated at the polls, the Nationals relied on the zonal electoral system.

As an Opposition backbencher, Bjelke-Petersen had railed against the zonal electoral system introduced by the Hanlon Labor government in 1948, but he had also correctly recognised it as one of the props that kept Labor in power. When his own turn to lead Queensland came, he presided over three redistributions in 1971, 1977 and 1985–86, all of which entrenched non-urban vote weightage with the intention of favouring his own party. As a leader who treated parliament, cabinet, public administration and the media as institutions to be bent to his will, he treated the electoral system no differently. Bjelke-Petersen shared the belief of other Nationals that a manipulated system was essential to the maintenance of power in Queensland, although Allen Callaghan says that he advised the abolition of the zonal system on the grounds that it made little difference to the end result. He adds, however, that its retention ‘was an article of faith’ for the Nationals. In Bjelke-Petersen’s words, ‘It is the tradition’.

Under the system of electoral weightage so established, the idea of ‘one vote, one value’ was rejected and the state was divided into four zones: the South-Eastern Zone, the Provincial Cities Zone, the Western and Far Northern Zone and the Country Zone. Votes cast in electorates within the Western and Far Northern Zone were worth between two and three times those cast in a South-East Zone electorate. Votes cast in the Country Zone electorates were worth one
and a half times those of city voters. Bjelke-Petersen told the Parliament that ‘the one vote, one value policy is short sighted’ because the zonal system ensured a balance between country and city. Unusually, given his customary low regard for academics, he drew upon research by Professor Colin Hughes in support of his argument, citing a study which showed ‘that there is only a 1.5 per cent bias in the electoral system to the conservative parties in Queensland whilst, in New South Wales, there is a massive 6 per cent bias to the ALP’. Other research has indicated that, compared with South Australia’s ‘Playmander’, ‘Queensland’s experiments in electoral manipulation and maldistribution have been relatively mild affairs’.

There have been worse cases of malapportionment in Australia and the fact that the Queensland system was based on single-member electoral districts with preferential voting needs to be borne in mind when considering electoral outcomes. Although the zonal system in itself did not keep Labor out of office, there is little doubt that the intent of the system was to maintain the National Party as the senior partner in the coalition, and, after the 1985 redistribution, in power in its own right. The 1985 redistribution, the first after the Nationals had won government in their own right, and one which owed much to the input of Don Lane, increased the number of state electorates from 82 to 89. The Nationals claimed that the increase was in response to the state’s population growth, but the Liberal and Labor Parties saw it as a strategy to enable the Nationals to protect the number of seats in the Country and Western and Far Northern zones, while taking advantage of population growth on the Gold and Sunshine Coasts. In addition, several seats in the metropolitan area were abolished. Changing demographic patterns justified altering the pattern of seats within the South-Eastern Zone, but the redistribution failed to take into account changes between the zones.

Although election results in Queensland during the Bjelke-Petersen era were within the margins expected in any system based on single-member electorates, the zonal system worked systematically to disadvantage both the Labor Party and the Liberal Party. This did not come about by chance, nor did it occur randomly:

Rather, is it the deliberate outcome of the longstanding government
policy, exacerbated by the provisions of the Elections Act 1983–85 which require the electoral commissioners to conduct their deliberations in private, not to reveal their submissions and to report solely to the Premier, not to the Parliament.\(^70\)

There were other ramifications of the zonal system. Clearly, the National Party believed in its efficacy, giving them a sense of invincibility and the psychological advantage that conferred. The Labor Party found it extremely demoralising, with the added irony that Labor had introduced it in the first place.\(^71\) Instead of finding rigged boundaries a spur to action, Labor lapsed into torpor, using the zonal system as an excuse for abandoning the field to Bjelke-Petersen and the Nationals.\(^72\) The zonal system also reinforced the decentralised nature of Queensland's political culture, where, outside Brisbane, members were seen as local members rather than party representatives. The zones entrenched such politics, to the advantage of the Nationals.\(^73\)

Even if this advantage were not, in practice, as great as either the Nationals or their opponents believed, the zonal system was of great symbolic significance, depriving any government elected under its auspices of legitimacy. To its supporters, however, history had taught that it was an essential prop for power and, for Bjelke-Petersen, holding on to power eventually became his raison d'être. Power had not always been quite an end itself, for he appears to have believed that he had 'made' Queensland and that his agenda was essential for keeping Queensland on the 'right' path. His belief that his agenda matched those of ordinary Queenslanders meant that he disregarded the checks and balances of political life.

To many observers, the autocrat he became was a far cry from the diffident politician he had once been. Yet an examination of his career shows that, armed with a strong belief in his own rectitude, he seized every opportunity that presented itself. Once in power, he held on to it tenaciously, as his survival of the 1970 'coup' demonstrates. He used every device possible to remain premier. Yet, by becoming increasingly reluctant to share power, he sowed the seeds of his downfall. His relations with Sparkes cooled, the coalition with the Liberals was broken, competent ministers like Ahern and Hodges, who opposed him, were ignored or demoted, and even senior
bureaucrats were eventually sidelined. Thus abandoned, there was little they could do but watch as the Bjelke-Petersen era drew to a close.

As a relatively new member of parliament, Bjelke-Petersen acknowledged what he later forgot, that all regimes eventually fall. In 1955 he informed the parliament that the Labor government was about to lose office despite rigged elections, and that both Hitler and Peron, once all powerful, had been swept from office. He reminded his colleagues then: ‘we know that sooner or later all dynasties come to an end.’

Notes
7. Lunn, Joh, p. 266.
21. ibid.
23. ibid.
24. ibid.
41. Wallace, op. cit., p. 213.
42. ibid., p. 212.
44. White, op. cit., p. 145.
47. G. Sparrow, quoted in White, op. cit., p. 29.
48. Grundy, op. cit., p. 34.
50. White, op. cit., p. 2.
52. Wallace, op. cit., p. 206.
53. Orr, op. cit., p. 44.
54. White, op. cit., p. 46.
55. Orr, op. cit., p. 46.
56. Grundy, op. cit., p. 32.
58. Quoted in Damian Murphy, 'Joh Has Lawyer, Will Sue', The Age, 17 September 1986, p. 11.
60. Whitton, op. cit., p. 110.
61. Murphy, op. cit., p. 11.
63. Between 1958 and 1971 there were only three zones.
65. ibid.
73. See P. Reynolds, Connectional Politics: The Queensland Case, paper presented to the 33rd Annual Australasian Political Studies Association Conference, Griffith University, Brisbane, July 1991.
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A saviour to some, reviled by others, Johannes Bjelke-Petersen became the butt of jokes and even assassination attempts. His influence spread well beyond Queensland, and in the mid-1970s he put an unknown French polisher into the Senate to help rub out the Whitlam government.

Young Joh had been a loner who worked hard to overcome crippling childhood polio and the poverty of life on his family’s farm. Enduring a long apprenticeship as an opposition backbencher, he finally made it to the top, bringing to his old-style autocratic rule a more media-savvy appeal to the electorate.

As this long-awaited biography reveals, Joh was as cunning as he was ruthless throughout his forty-year political career. Rae Wear analyses in detail his political psyche, his unique leadership style and the reasons for his electoral support, taking into account his Danish immigrant background and lifelong Christian piety.

Essential reading for anyone interested in Australian politics, this biographical study explains in depth, for the first time, Bjelke-Petersen’s unlikely elevation to the premiership and his ultimate disgrace amid revelations of widespread corruption.