Frank Nicklin and the Coalition Government, 1957-1968

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Coalition governments are Queensland’s political past and future. As the three major parties prepare for the 1989 state elections, none of them has a strong chance of winning government in their own right. If no party wins the numbers to govern alone, a conservative coalition government seems the most likely outcome if Queensland is not to enter an Italian-style era of unstable administrations, minority governments and frequent elections. This paper examines the coalition governments that ruled Queensland during the most tranquil decade of its recent political history — the Nicklin governments of 1957 to 1968. It concentrates on the relationship between the two conservative parties during Frank Nicklin’s stewardship. Many times, Nicklin and his calming influence would prove the most important element in keeping the relationship on an even keel.

When he came to power in 1957 after the Labor split, Nicklin, although the most senior member of the government side, had had no experience in government. He was elected to Parliament on the day in 1932 when the conservative coalition of Arthur Moore was defeated at the polls. But Nicklin, as well as having seen the disastrous results to the Labour party when it failed to suppress the discord within its ranks, had experienced the full frustrating and erratic history of coalition co-operation during a quarter of a century in opposition.

The conservative coalition forged by Arthur Moore under the label Country-Progressive Nationalist Party (CPNP) lasted one term in opposition, but after they were annihilated at the polls in 1935, disintegration was swift. On 6 April 1936 the CPNP organisation formally resolved to disband. The rural and urban conservative parties limped along separately in opposition for a while, openly suspicious of each other and frequently voicing their distrust and differences in public.¹

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In 1941 the Forgan Smith Labor government cruised to an easy win, winning forty-one seats to the Country Party’s fourteen and the United Australia Party’s four. The latter, forerunner to the Liberals, had made occasional overtures to the Country Party to form an anti-Labor coalition, but the Country Party organisation, somewhat unrealistically, continually refused even to enter into any negotiations.

The Country Party members, dissatisfied and impatient, acted on their own initiative. Acting Prime Minister Arthur Fadden convened a secret meeting of Federal and state parliamentarians from both conservative parties at Parliament House in Brisbane on 27 April 1941. An alliance that was dubbed the Country-National Party was formed without the prior knowledge of the party organisations, infuriating Country Party officials, although the United Australia Party president was both surprised and delighted.

Fadden declared that he wished to form a “National” government composed of all parties to cope with the war situation, much as Winston Churchill had done in Britain. One Country Party official, Allan Campbell, sour and sceptical, wanted to know why the self-styled architect of national political unity had not troubled to ask any Labor parliamentarians to the meeting.

A SURPRISE ELECTION

Frank Nicklin, smiling pineapple farmer and minor war hero had hitherto served with dignity, if not with special distinction on the opposition backbenches. He was now elected unopposed to the state parliamentary leadership of the new alliance. The new party, divorced from organisational backing, had a brief life. By 1944, worried that the organisation could endorse — and have returned — other candidates, the rebellious members, including Nicklin, returned to the fold. His brief period of political intransigence over, Nicklin was now tamely content to leave the initiative for alliances to the party executive. A few days before the 1944 poll — and another thrashing for the conservatives — Nicklin said that he would agree to a coalition, but he stressed that any decision to form one was a matter for the party.

A formal coalition might have made it easier for opposition leader Nicklin to present a united front to the electorate, but he did not push for it. The parties co-operated at a parliamentary level on an informal basis and the arrangement worked reasonably well. Sir Thomas Hiley recalled that there were a few grumbles from the Country Party members because Hiley, as financial spokesman for the conservatives, would customarily open the opposition’s reply on the budget, but this did not jeopardise the unofficial alliance.
Seat contesting arrangements between the two parties varied from election to election. Sometimes elements of farce were present. In July 1952 the conservative challenger for the Labor seat Port Curtis was reported by the Country Party organisation to be “confused” after he was approached by both the Country Party and the Liberals to run under their banner. Eventually he received joint endorsement, and on election day, a thrashing. When the Liberals were awarded the right to run a candidate in the seat of Nash, based around Gympie, a Country Party official lamented: “We are confronted with the distasteful business of trying to force our people to vote for a Liberal, which they emphatically refuse to do.” The Liberal was defeated.8
Despite episodes such as these, a full merger of the two organisations was never seriously contemplated. After the conservatives were customarily thrashed in the 1953 elections the Country Party member for Southport Eric Gaven moved the resolution at the next party conference that the parties merge under the name United Party in a bid to reverse the trend of rapidly diminishing support, but the motion was defeated.\textsuperscript{9}

John Ahern, father of the current Premier and president of the Country Party from 1965 to 1968 has given several reasons for the party's perpetual refusal to amalgamate with the Liberals. Firstly, the idea had been tried before and had failed. Secondly, amalgamation would provide grounds for the formation of breakaway parties composed of purist followers of both conservative philosophies. This happened in 1941 when four Country Party members refused to participate in Fadden’s merger. Thirdly, the continued Liberal espousal of the one vote, one value principle was totally unacceptable to the Country Party.\textsuperscript{10}

The Country Party also feared that its regional priorities could be lost in an amalgamation. Party President Harold Richter told a conference in 1957, a few months before the coalition victory:

\begin{quote}
\ldots the Country Party must always remain free and unfettered from any political arrangement which may jeopardise the balanced development of Australia. We must be free to fight for the stability and well-being of our primary industries \ldots
\end{quote}

By now the conservatives were learning from the errors of the past. For the 1956 election, seats were allocated well in advance and although the coalition only won one extra seat, Nicklin reported to Richter that “fighting the campaign on a coordinated basis with the Liberal Party was definitely an advantage as it eliminated entirely the differences which at previous elections had proved so detrimental”.\textsuperscript{12}

There is no question that the conservative parties emphasised their unity of purpose during the 1957 campaign. With Labor hopelessly divided, the tactic was a hard one to fault. The Liberals agreed to a joint policy speech which in itself was a model of coalition cooperation. Nicklin delivered his part of the speech at Maroochydore on 1 July and Morris completed it in Brisbane the next evening. Both leaders promised to encourage industrial expansion and the development of new businesses in Queensland — time worn and predictable conservative platitudes. Both stressed the unity of the two parties as opposed to the divisions of Labor. Otherwise, the speeches did not overlap.\textsuperscript{13}
GOVERNMENT LEADER

After the election the Liberals had ten new seats, but except for the Darling Downs seats of Lockyer and Toowoomba, they were confined to the Brisbane metropolitan area. With their parliamentary numbers more than doubled, the Liberals could feel more than pleased, but the Country Party had twenty-four seats, six more than the Liberals. It was clear who had the numbers to call the shots in government.

The disparity was emphasised in 1958 when the coalition members hammered out a redistribution agreement. After hours of haggling, a bargain was struck. Four extra seats were created in the metropolitan area and one in the country was abolished. In return, and to their everlasting regret the Liberals agreed to keep the system of weighted zonal representation, thus ensuring that while there was a coalition the Country Party would always have the numbers.

Nicklin was not the man to spurn the advantages of having the numbers, but he did not lean unduly on his partners either. Before the election the coalition parties had agreed to allocate the premiership to the senior party and the treasury to the junior one. Once six Country Party and five Liberal men had been selected by exhaustive ballot among the parliamentarians, Nicklin and the Liberal leader Ken Morris conferred and allocated the portfolios. Morris recalled in 1978: “Frank Nicklin and I formed this government without the slightest acrimony, disputation or disagreement”.

Morris was not always an easy man with whom to work. He was a hard worker, but he was ambitious and had a somewhat abrasive personality. Lacking a certain subtlety in his political technique, he once advised a group of Liberal candidates “When you see a head, hit it”. Even so, his high regard for Nicklin cannot be doubted. The two men had been friends since Morris’ childhood. Morris once recalled that he had had his father’s praise of Nicklin’s honesty and straightforwardness “dinned into me” ever since he could remember.

Childhood sentiments aside, Nicklin was a very easy man with whom to work and Morris knew it. He said: “It’s not at all easy to quarrel with Frank Nicklin. I’ve never worked with anyone who has the knack of presenting the opposite case with so little offence. You have a sense of trusting him all the while.”

Nicklin, affable and complaisant, was willing to exercise extreme tact with the volatile Morris. Although submissions from individual cabinet ministers were customarily dealt with in order of receipt, the wily Morris would sometimes plead an upcoming and important engagement elsewhere in order to have his proposals discussed first. Nicklin cottoned on to Morris’ ploy after a while but, no doubt with
a mental shrug of his broad coalitionist shoulders, usually let his partner jump the queue.

Morris made some sound contributions, but he was also capable of coming up with occasional harebrained proposals, some of which, unlike his industrial legislation that precipitated the strikes at Mt. Isa, did not get far in the cabinet room. When he was rebuffed, Morris would storm out after accusing his colleagues of plotting against him. These incidents became more frequent and there was a corresponding decline in Morris' prestige and effectiveness. His decision to retire from state politics in late 1962 came as a relief to the Premier. Nicklin never complained about Morris in public — he was too much of a coalitionist for that. Even in retirement all he would say of Morris' erratic behaviour for the oral history project carried out by the National Library of Australia was that his colleague "was very impetuous and required a little bit of restraining at times".
By all accounts, Nicklin got on well with the Liberal ministers in his cabinet. He had shared too many years with them in futile opposition to wish to quarrel. Organisational differences between the two parties did not readily permeate to the parliamentary sphere. The busy legislative programme in the early years consisted largely of measures that both parties held were long overdue after a quarter century of Labor rule, so here there was little potential for conflict.

**AMALGAMATION REJECTED**

Nicklin's sage regulation of decision-making in cabinet was calculated to promote coalition unity. There was no domination of Cabinet by the Premier. After a submission had been discussed it was put to the vote. In the event that support for the measure came chiefly from the Liberals, that was no obstacle to its implementation if it was favoured by a healthy cabinet majority. Nicklin was reluctant, however, to proceed if the majority was slim or if there was a clear division along party lines within Cabinet.18

At the 1959 Liberal convention a motion was carried to offer the Country Party complete union of the two parties “on any reasonable terms the Country Party may nominate”.19 As usual, the offer was refused, but there were no hard feelings, and relations between the parties remained healthy.

The relative strength of the two parties precluded the possibility of Nicklin governing in his own right. There is no evidence that he ever particularly wished to do so. In mid-1962 it was reported that Morris had assured Nicklin that even if the Liberals won more seats than the Country Party at the 1963 state election Nicklin would still remain Premier.20 Of course, whether Morris, whose personal prestige within his party had declined significantly, was in a position to guarantee unconditional support of the Liberals to Nicklin is another matter, as indeed is the matter of whether he would have been able to resist taking over the premiership himself. Still, the fact that such assurances could be made, or at least soberly reported, testifies to the cordial relations between the two leaders.

On 12 July 1962 the parties each agreed to contest thirty-six seats in the 1963 election, basing their allocations on the distribution of candidates in 1960. By now, a few clouds had gathered around the Liberal expansionism into traditional Country Party areas.

From the late 1950s onwards the Liberals had been discreetly organising on the Gold Coast and the Redcliffe peninsula. Both were safe areas for the Country Party, but the demography of these regions
was changing. Rapid population increases, mostly in the form of wealthy urban retirees, had turned the coastal centres from something akin to large country towns to sizeable urban centres, providing the Liberals with a natural power base from which to operate. In retrospect, it was inevitable that these regions would become the first flashpoints for intra-coalition jealousy.

In the electorate of Redcliffe the independent member, Jim Houghton accepted an offer to join the Liberals. But under the coalition agreement, Redcliffe was Country Party turf. The Country Party insisted that Houghton was not a member of the coalition government, and they refused to allow him to attend joint party meeting.

For a few days the Country Party held a gun at the Liberals’ hapless heads. The Liberals blinked first and decided that Houghton, while he could remain a member of the Redcliffe branch of the Liberal party, had to sit in Parliament as an independent. If the arrangement suited the Liberals, it did not suit Houghton, who said: “I am not going to be a member of an organisation which does not have the courage to stand up and fight.” Houghton resigned from the Liberal Party.

There was a twist to the Houghton affair in July 1962 when deputy Country Party leader Jack Pizzey approached Houghton and asked him to join the Country Party. Houghton agreed, upsetting the Liberals who regarded Redcliffe as a suburb of Brisbane and thus natural Liberal territory, but after their lack of support for Houghton as a Liberal they were hardly in a moral position to criticise him. But like good coalition partners they agreed to aid the Country Party in its efforts to have Houghton re-elected in 1963.

The face of coalition relations was altered forever on 31 October 1962 when, after months of haggling, both parties agreed to reintroduce preferential voting after a lapse of twenty years.

The Liberals had been far keener than the Country Party to see preferential voting return. From 1958 to 1962 every Liberal convention had voted overwhelmingly in favour of it, but the Country Party feared, correctly, that it would provide the Liberals with the means and the excuse to mount three-cornered contests in seats that were considered Country Party territory. The deciding factor was the rapidly diminishing strength of the Queensland Labor Party, the grouping made up of members that had stayed loyal to Nicklin’s predecessor Vince Gair, in the wake of the Labor split.

In 1960 Gair’s party had been reduced from eleven seats to four, while the official Labor party had increased its vote from 28.89 per cent in 1957 to 39.89 per cent in 1960. Neither of the coalition parties could boast similar increases, so it could be inferred that QLP voters were returning to the official Labor fold. If the trend continued, it
was reasoned, the coalition could well lose seats if the next election was run under the first past the post system.

Gair lost his own seat in 1960, but remained president of the QLP. Crotchety as ever, he asserted publicly that his party might not bother with the 1963 election if preferential voting was not reintroduced.  

The Liberals felt that better use could be made of the hardcore QLP vote. Liberal strategists believed that eighty-five to ninety per cent of the QLP preferences could be expected to favour the coalition.  

Nicklin was characteristically cautious and diplomatic at the joint party meeting held to discuss the proposal. Carefully steering the middle course, the Premier summarised the arguments for and against, adding that he personally favoured the reintroduction of the optional preferential voting system that had existed between 1892 and 1942. Many Country Party men were still dubious. Alan Munro, who had recently replaced Morris as Liberal leader assured them that the Liberals were not trying to make gains at their expense. Munro declared that he would resign from the leadership if any Liberal branches in the country nominated candidates against sitting Country Party members.

The vote was close, and although figures were not revealed it was reported that several Country Party men changed their minds at the last minute. It was agreed to amend the Election Act. To minimise the effect of the minor parties, preferential voting was made compulsory.  

### THREE-CORNERED CONTESTS

After preferential voting was adopted, coalition relations were never the same again. With first past the post voting, there was little point in splitting the anti-Labor vote by running Liberal and Country Party candidates against one another. But now it could be argued that preferential voting maximised the anti-Labor vote if a strict exchange of preferences was observed. Some seats had been won in New South Wales and Victoria using this strategy, but in these states the Country Party was very much the junior partner, and had very little chance of ever winning more seats than the Liberals. In Queensland, the Liberals were never able to sell to the Country Party the assurance that the running of candidates against sitting Country Party members was aimed at increasing the anti-Labor vote and not at dislodging enough of them to win coalition seniority.

The Liberals continued to be frustrated by signs that they were amassing strong support outside their delineated territory. The party organ, the *Queensland Liberal* reported in February 1965 that of the new branches established in 1964, one third of them were outside
Brisbane. To many Liberals it seemed negligent not to take advantage of that strength. The fact that their party continually polled more votes, but won less seats than the Country Party only added to their impatience.

Friction between the two parties was a fact of life after the Liberal Party State Conference in May 1964. A resolution to contest rural seats held by the Country Party was passed with the support of between eighty and ninety per cent of delegates. Charles Porter, Liberal party secretary, later claimed in his autobiography The gut feeling the credit for steering the resolution “through a resounding affirmation” at the conference.26

Nicklin was restrained in his criticism. On Meet the Press he reminded Queensland viewers: “It is not good politics for the Liberal Party to establish branches in traditional Country Party seats. The success of the government has been due to the close organisational and parliamentary co-operation of the parties.”27

Certain Liberals did not reciprocate Nicklin’s restraint, and appear to have been eager to find any excuse to criticise the Premier. At the Young Liberals conference at Southport in May 1965 Ern Harley, a former Mayor of the Gold Coast, attacked Nicklin for urging Country Party members to give their preferences to Labor in the Gold Coast seat of Albert in the 1963 election.28 What Harley failed to mention was that the unusual Country Party–Labor preference deal was a one off arrangement aimed at saving the hide of a Country Party member who was running against a strong independent candidate — Harley himself.

On 2 April 1965 the state Liberal president Senator R.D. Sherrington affirmed that the Liberals would contest some Country Party seats at the next election “for the benefit of the coalition”. Ten or twelve seats only would be contested — “a reasonable and moderate decision” — and the Country Party would receive the full allocation of preferences.29

Nicklin attacked the proposal, but remained as calm as ever. “The two parties should get together and work out the seats each one will fight — I don’t believe in three-cornered elections”. Keith Livingston, vice-president of the Young Liberals, accused Nicklin of being more afraid of losing coalition seniority rather than government.30

Nicklin certainly had more reason to fear the loss of the former than the latter. With a weak Labor party, a favourable redistribution, and the benefit of the preferences of the QLP (who by this time were the DLP) the coalition itself was safely ensconced in government, but unlike the Liberals the Country Party could take no comfort from changes in Queensland’s demography. Rapid urbanisation on both the coasts was creating new ground for the Liberals, but voter enrolments in most Country Party seats were down. In 1965 the
respective party strengths stood at twenty-six for the Country Party and twenty for the Liberals. The Liberals thus needed to win only four seats from their partners to attain coalition seniority, and with the Liberals contesting areas where they could draw on newly-arrived reserves of voter strength there was no guarantee that this would not happen.

Nicklin tried his best to mend the rift. On 4 July he urged the Country Party to promise not to contest any seat against a sitting Liberal if the Liberals would promise not to run a candidate in Albert. “Even though under severe provocation, we should still be prepared to make an effort to maintain the status quo.”

The Country Party did not endorse any candidates in Liberal-held seats, but the Liberals contested eight seats against the Country Party in 1966. Three were won easily by Labor, but the campaigns in the five beach resort seats — Albert, Logan, South Coast, Redcliffe and Nicklin’s old seat of Murrumba — were more intense and bitter. No seats changed hands, but the Liberals presented a very real threat to the Country Party in Albert, Logan and South Coast. In the latter seat the Country Party candidate Russ Hinze trailed the Liberals on first preferences, but was elected narrowly when the Labor preferences favoured him by four to one. In Albert, Ern Harley tried again, this
time as an endorsed Liberal candidate, but the sitting member Cec Carey won narrowly. In Carey’s first speech to the new parliament in August he accused Harley of using spies during the campaign.32

Writing in 1969 Colin Hughes observed that the Liberals’ subsequent lack of enthusiasm for three-cornered contests suggested that the 1966 experiment was a failure. Hughes spoke too soon, but the experiment had not worked well. In most cases, the combined Country Party and Liberal vote was down from what the Country Party had obtained on their own in 1963. Moreover, Liberal preferences were not directed to the Country Party in the proportions for which the Liberal organisation had hoped, lending weight to the Country Party contention that three-cornered contests could cost the coalition seats.

The 1966 campaign was Nicklin’s last. The focus of intra-coalition conflict switched to the Legislative Assembly where the so-called “Ginger Group” led by Charles Porter (who entered Parliament as the member for Toowong in 1966) took the lead in harassing the Country Party. Porter, who later modified his views enough to become perhaps the strongest supporter of Premier Bjelke-Petersen among the Liberals in parliament, was at pains in 1980 to emphasise that the coalition conflicts of the 1960s did not involve any personal animosity against Nicklin. Porter declared that researchers of the period “will not find alleged against the late Frank Nicklin the palest shadow of the vituperation, abuse and charges of corrupt and despotic practices that have been a consistent feature of (recent) Liberal pronouncements”.

Liberal attacks on Nicklin himself were rare, but not unknown. In March 1967 Nicklin introduced a bill to provide for the regulation of chiropractors in Queensland. In normal circumstances the Liberal Health minister Douglas Tooth would have introduced the bill, but he was sceptical as to the merits of the profession. Tooth baulked at introducing the bill, so Nicklin introduced it himself. Relieved, Tooth commented: “The Premier has my complete personal loyalty, and I am very grateful to him for having arranged the matter in the way he has.”

Another Liberal, John Murray, was more strident in his criticism, and said: “This is an infamous proposal.” He then went on to attack Nicklin for disregarding the wishes of a large minority in the combined party room, as well as the advice of the Health minister.

Nicklin listened patiently. His reply said more about himself than about chiropractors or Murray.

Murray saw fit to make a personal attack on me. I do not mind that in the least. I have been attacked personally by many people. In fact, I have been insulted by experts. I will give the honourable
member a little bit of advice on parliamentary procedure and Cabinet government. If he desires at any time to attain eminence in his own party he should forget personal recriminations against other members, particularly members of the party to which he subscribes. I should like to remind him that one of the great attributes that all Parliamentarians should endeavour to possess, particularly in a party, is loyalty to their colleagues. That is all I wish to say on the subject. 35

It was a dignified exit for the Premier, but the bill was defeated. Murray said of his clash with the Premier: "I do not hold any personal rancour against Mr. Nicklin, or any other member whatsoever." 36

While Nicklin's stable temperament helped to ensure that the differences between the Liberal and Country Party organisations did not seriously affect party co-operation at the parliamentary level, he was aided by the fact that virtually all of the senior Liberals of his time were staunch coalitionists. Of the four Liberal leaders of Nicklin's time, Ken Morris was by far the least temperamentally suited to co-operating with the Country Party, but his high regard for Nicklin could never be called into question. It may have also been fortuitous that Morris' leadership of the Liberals was closest in time to the unfortunate example of the Labor split.

Alan Munro was an honest, unassuming and retiring man whose word was trusted by enough of the Country Party to allow preferential voting to be introduced. Even though the Liberal organisation later overrode Munro's promise that the Liberals would not endorse other candidates against sitting Country Party members, Munro's coalitionist credentials were never called into question.

THE FINAL YEARS

Thomas Hiley, who had previously led the Liberals from July 1949 to August 1954, served only a few months in his second stint as Liberal leader. Hiley enjoyed a warm personal friendship with Nicklin, and his brief tenure as deputy Premier did nothing to change this.

The last Liberal leader to work with Nicklin was Gordon Chalk. Chalk was particularly emphatic in his support of the coalition, and was always critical of the groups within the Liberal Party that were undermining coalition harmony. The Young Liberals were one such group. In January 1966 Chalk told their conference at Rockhampton somewhat condescendingly: "By all means have your discussions, but do not be too critical of the government." 37 Two months later, when under pressure to deliver a separate policy speech to Nicklin, he threatened to resign from the Liberal leadership rather than do so. 38
Chalk’s pro-coalitionist sentiments even went as far as to oppose the formation of Liberal branches in some areas of his own electorate of Lockyer. He recalled how he valued the support of an influential section of the Gatton township who were members of the Country Party, but had helped vote him into Parliament in the absence of a Country Party candidate. “I continued to retain their friendship rather than allow the Libs. to enter the area and stir up trouble.” Chalk was keen to see the two parties link together, but realised the incompatibility of the two organisations.

When Nicklin retired, Chalk used his influence with the Liberal executive to persuade them not to contest Nicklin’s seat of Landsborough, but the Landsborough branch of the Liberal Party endorsed a candidate against the wishes of the executive. Chalk supported the Country Party candidate, Mike Ahern, as Ahern was the official candidate of the government. In his reminiscences Charles Porter alleged that Chalk’s fear of being opposed by a Country Party candidate in Lockyer was in part behind his wish to see Landsborough uncontested by the Liberals.

As a coalitionist Frank Nicklin could hardly be faulted. Most circumstances favoured a coalition between the two conservative parties. The memory of the Labor split was fresh. The two parties were substantially in agreement on most issues. Although the Liberals were the junior partners, their holding of important portfolios like the treasury, labour and industry, and transport meant that at cabinet level they were on reasonably equal footing with the Country Party. Here Nicklin’s cautious style of government came most effectively into play. He no doubt saved many an argument within cabinet by refusing to proceed if a proposal was favoured by a narrow majority, or if it was obvious that there was a division along party lines.

All four Liberal leaders were men with whom Nicklin could work effectively. Indeed, all senior Liberals of Nicklin’s time favoured the existing coalition arrangements, with the exception of Alex Dewar, Minister for Industrial Development from January 1965, who was touted as a possible successor to Hiley when the latter retired. Dewar was the only Liberal minister to openly support three-cornered contests. Nicklin wisely deferred an announcement on whether the leaders of the government parties would deliver joint policy speeches in the 1966 campaign until a new Liberal leader was elected to replace Hiley. Chalk was elected leader, with Dewar as his deputy. Dewar was forced to resign from the cabinet in mid-1967 after allegations of personal misconduct were made against him.

Nicklin was constantly aware of the need for a stable coalition. He knew that his ends would not be served by making provocative statements against the fractious elements in the Liberal Party. Some
would contend that Nicklin should have been a little firmer, but it is hard to imagine what he could have said or done to quell the aims of the Liberal expansionists. A less temperate leader would have been a distinct liability for those within the government who wished for the coalition to be maintained. Considering the later history of the coalition it is hard to argue that a sterner line from Nicklin would have helped much. Neither his soft answers, nor the later (and firmer) answers of Premier Bjelke-Petersen served to placate those who were willing to risk their own political destruction.

Never far from Nicklin's mind were the twenty-five years in opposition and the accident of history that had ended them. While opening the last Country Party conference that he attended as Premier he counselled delegates:

Let us not make the same mistake as our Socialist opponents made a decade ago. We should let the troubles of our Labor opponent serve as a reminder of the disastrous results that follow disunity in a government's ranks. It would be a great mistake to imagine that we could indulge in a struggle for party supremacy within the coalition and escape the severe censure of the electors.43

Nicklin's words were proved correct — for the Liberals — sixteen years later, in the watershed election of 1983. For the National Party they remain a warning of events that may yet come to pass.

END NOTES

1. *Courier-Mail*, 31 March 1941.
5. *Courier-Mail*, 29 April 1941.
18. This account of cabinet procedure is based on discussions with Sir Gordon Chalk and Sir Thomas Hiley, who at the time of writing (mid-1989) were the only surviving members of Nicklin's first cabinet.

28. Courier-Mail, 3 and 5 May 1965.
34. Courier-Mail, 12 December 1980.
35. For the chiropractor's bill, see Q.P.D., v. 245 (1966/67), p. 2638ff.
42. Courier-Mail, 28 September 1965.