

QUEENSLAND

Matters of political importance and interest in Queensland in the period under review were the road toll, police corruption, local government elections and, as ever, coalition relations and the internal affairs of the major political parties. As Brisbane readied itself for the commonwealth games in September-October, however, attention and concern were directed to the issues of Aboriginal land rights and civil liberties.

The ALP

Positive steps towards final resolution of the internal conflict within the state branch were taken early in the New Year when representatives of the 'Old Guard' proposed a 14-point peace plan to the new administration. Of greatest significance to the latter was the hoped-for recovery of the party's assets, including Brisbane radio station 4KQ, which had been stalled by Mr Clem Jones, through his appeal to the high court against last year's supreme court ruling in favour of the new administration (see previous chronicle). After discussion of counter-proposals put forward by party president, Dr D. J. Murphy, and secretary, Mr Peter Beattie, a compromise settlement was negotiated, which would reunite the Queensland branch and staunch the haemorrhage of members, finance and electoral support which the party has suffered for a number of years.

Under the terms of the agreement, the new administration returned to the party's headquarters at Breakfast Creek, Mr Jones dropped his high court appeal, while the present administrative committee accepted responsibility for all debts incurred by the old administration, including its legal costs, and pledged itself to pay half the expenses of Mr Jones's high court action. Former party members and affiliated unions who had left the party after federal intervention were to be eligible for immediate reinstatement to membership. The party's state conference in June would elect directors to all ALP companies but in the meantime these, including radio station 4KQ, would be administered by a joint committee of 'Old' and 'New Guard' officers. The terms of settlement were ratified quickly by the local organization and the party's federal executive, thus clearing the way for a united administration to contest the local government elections in March, even though some members of the administrative committee believed that retribution should have been exacted against Old Guard officials, and, in particular, against Mr Clem Jones. For his part, Jones made it clear that he would not be joining the new state branch, thus ending a membership in the party of thirty years.

That the ALP still had some way to go to achieve complete unity was evidenced by several happenings in the following weeks. The state president of the storeman and packers union, Mr Ernie Adsett, an Old Guard stalwart, made it publicly clear that his union was having second thoughts about re-affiliation.

If we are going back, we want something for our money. We don't want it squandered by the so-called Socialist Left, who are neither Socialist nor Left, or by feminist activists who don't want equality with men but rather superiority.¹

Mr Adsett also surfaced as the leader of a revolt by members of six ALP branches in the Colmslie ward of the Brisbane City Council. Their overwhelming vote in favour of an Old Guard candidate, Mr Vic. Lucas, was vetoed by the administrative committee, which appointed a young Socialist Left candidate in the person of Mr John Campbell. Other prominent members of the Old Guard called for Mr Clem Jones to be endorsed for Colmslie and indeed, for a time, it seemed that Jones might intervene in the elections for the Brisbane City Council as leader of a small team of unofficial Labor candidates. His supporters acted on the premise that as a long-serving, popular ex-Lord Mayor of Brisbane, Jones would attract considerable electoral support. However, this came to nothing. Nevertheless, an indication was provided in April that factions were not only coming into being within the state branch but would be formalized under the change to proportional representation within the party's organizations. A group called the

Labor traditionalists, or Labor T for short, in that month announced its existence and was formally recognized by the party's administration in June. Its avowed purpose was to attract all Old Guard members to wage war against what it saw as the growing influence of the Socialist Left within the state branch. As expressed by the branch's secretary, Mr Nick Bos (former state secretary), its existence also had much to do with power relationships within the party: 'We believe that if all the former members return to the ALP, by the time of the 1983 state ALP conference the people who represented the traditional principles of the party will again control the administrative body of the ALP.'²

In a press statement after the legal reconciliation of Old and New Guard had been achieved, Dr Murphy had stated that the administration's next goal was 'the selection of first class candidates in marginal State seats'.³ To this end, he himself nominated for ALP preselection in the marginal, Liberal-held seat of Stafford. In the first of a two-tier system for selecting candidates, i.e. the local plebiscite, Dr Murphy was defeated soundly by former Brisbane City alderman, Mr Brian Mellifont, 30 to 18. Media speculation was that Murphy had failed in his attempt to enter Parliament and that there were now grave doubts that he could retain the party presidency at the party's mid-year convention. In the event, Murphy won in the electoral college, the second tier, where he recorded 44 votes to Mellifont's 36. It was alleged, however, that his victory was bought at the expense of a deal with the Socialist Left faction. In return for its support for Murphy, rumour had it that the Centre Left (of which Murphy is said to be a member) 'dumped' its nominee for Kurilpa, Mr A. Bellas, to allow the Socialist Left's candidate, Ms A. Warner, to triumph. To the outside observer, it would seem that the events recorded above are evidence for the proposition that reconstruction of the Queensland branch has 'introduced into Labor politics in this state the tightly organized factionalism so noticeable in the Victorian and New South Wales ALP branches since their own reorganizations in the late 1960s.

Meanwhile in the parliamentary Labor party its leader, Mr Ed Casey, was proving that he had as many political lives as the proverbial cat. Early in the year on a visit to Queensland, his party's former federal parliamentary leader, Mr Gough Whitlam, had attacked once again Casey's leadership, asserting that he was the most hopeless Labor leader in Australia and one who had let down all who supported and gave money to his party. Worse was to follow. Refreshed by a visit across the water to New Zealand, the premier, Mr Bjelke-Petersen, intimated, at his first press conference on his return, that a scandal would soon be uncovered in the ALP. And so it came to pass. On the grounds that there was reasonable suspicion of an offence to bribe a member of Parliament, Queensland police officers, with a search warrant, seized and examined records and commonwealth bank accounts operated by Casey under the account name of Caspalp Promotions. These were accounts used by Casey to hold campaign funds prior to the 1980 state election and included three \$10,000 donations made to the Labor party by Mr Ted Vibert on behalf of his Australian Club Development Association, a group lobbying for the introduction of poker machines into clubs in Queensland and Victoria.

Casey made a grave initial error of judgement in denying, in a television interview, that such donations had been received by him on behalf of his party—a denial he was forced to retract on a later occasion, once more of the facts of the matter had become public knowledge. The premier, set to make political capital out of the situation, even called a special cabinet meeting to discuss whether Parliament should be recalled to debate whether Casey had acted improperly in accepting campaign donations from the poker machine lobby. It was brought home to the premier at this meeting, however, that public discussion of political donations could rebound only on the government parties, particularly as Vibert claimed he had donated to the election campaigns of selected Liberal party candidates and to the Bjelke-Petersen Foundation, as well as to the ALP. Casey, in the meantime, cleared himself of any impropriety in the handling and use of the Vibert donations and offered to disclose details of contributions to Labor's campaign funds, provided the government parties would do the same.

All was not well, however, within the parliamentary Labor party itself. Mr Bob Gibbs (Wolston), shadow spokesman on police matters criticized his front-bench colleague, Mr Kevin Hooper (Archerfield), former police and now housing spokesman, for allegedly unsubstantiated claims of corruption that he had made in Parliament against senior police officials, including the commissioner, Mr Terry Lewis. Caucus reprimanded both men. Gibbs soon found himself in further trouble when it was learned that he had asked for and received 'a lift' with the minister for police, Mr Hinze, in the police aeroplane to a Toowoomba race meeting. This indiscretion placed in jeopardy his re-endorsement for Wolston, where his former campaign manager, Mr Paul Tully, was persuaded by party officers to lodge a last-minute nomination against him. He was saved only by the personal intervention of the federal Labor leader, Mr Bill Hayden, who interceded to have Tully withdraw.

Speculation on Casey's future as leader mounted as groups of caucus members continued to hold secret meetings on the issue. These produced no decisive result as, while there was majority agreement that Casey must go, consensus could not be reached on a successor. The publication in the *Bulletin* in June of the latest Morgan Gallup Poll brought forth a further round of meetings and discussion within the parliamentary party. The poll results showed that while ALP support had risen to 45 per cent, Casey's personal popularity as leader had slumped a further 2 per cent to 28. His inability to accept advice and to

weld caucus into a team lent credence to the growing belief that his leadership was proving electorally damaging to his party. The caucus dissidents finally acted, 13 of them applying to Mr Les Yewdale, caucus secretary, by letter and telegram, for a 'spill' of positions within the parliamentary party. As one telegram was ruled out of order because it specified neither time nor date for the meeting, the majority needed to call the meeting was not forthcoming and the revolt petered out. In an attempt to paper over the cracks before the party conference, state secretary Peter Beattie persuaded Mr Keith Wright and Mr Tom Burns, two of the most able and better known Labor parliamentarians, to re-enter the shadow ministry while eliciting a promise from Casey to be less of the autocrat and more of the team leader. It seemed likely, however, that reorganization of his shadow ministry would do no more than delay temporarily Casey's ultimate removal from the leadership.

In mid-June the first fully representative conference of the state branch since federal intervention took place. It was not without its surprises, the first of which was the determined opposition put up by the 'traditionalist' group of mainly Old Guard union delegates to the re-election of Dr Murphy as party president. The challenge, from Mr Errol Hodder, Australian workers' union state secretary, was beaten off, 118 to 91 votes, only with Socialist Left support and after intense lobbying by Hayden on Murphy's behalf. This alliance of the AWU with the Old Guard was successful in having Hodder elected as senior vice-president, while Mrs Jean Davis ousted the Socialist Left's Mrs Joy Ardill in another vice-presidential contest. Hodder was chosen also as one of the two state conference delegates to the party's federal executive, together with Mr Ian McLean of the Socialist Left. Balloting for the 20 positions on the 27-person administrative committee gave 8 to the Socialist Left, 5 to the Centre Left, 4 to the Old Guard, and 3 to the AWU. On those figures it seemed likely that the Centre Left group, which claims Murphy and Beattie as members, will have to 'deal' with other factions, notably that of the Socialist Left, if it wishes to continue to have the controlling voice in the party's affairs that it has had since federal intervention.

During this period, the ALP moved to reconstitute the Young Labor Movement which had been suspended since federal intervention. It lost one of its longstanding and active members with the death of Mrs Vi Jordan in early May. She had been the first woman ALP member of the Legislative Assembly (and only the second woman), holding Ipswich West for the party from 1966-74.

The coalition parties

Throughout the period under review, the National party persisted in its efforts to persuade the Liberals to return to the joint-Senate ticket arrangement which the latter abandoned in 1980. The Nationals' president, Sir Robert Sparkes, was convinced that, in the event of a double dissolution of federal Parliament, the Australian Democrats could win an extra Queensland Senate seat at the next federal election unless the coalition parties closed ranks. To date, his pleas would appear to have fallen on deaf ears, with the Liberals' state organization giving no indication that it will back away from its present policy of forging a clear and separate identity in Queensland. To this end it opened a North Queensland headquarters at Townsville, naming former state president, Mrs Yvonne McComb, as coordinator of the party's future development in that area. The vacant post of state director was filled by Mr Gary Neat, a former ABC political journalist, while Ms Carol Mason was promoted to state secretary. However, at the same time, it was rumoured that moves were afoot within the party to moderate the organization's 'hard-line' towards the coalition. If accurate, this would seem to indicate that the party, as a whole, is not committed fully as yet to any particular policy in regard to its relationship with the Nationals.

All was not harmonious within the National party either. The struggle between the premier and his supporters on the one hand and the organizational wing on the other over the premier's desire for complete ascendancy over the party has been going on for some time but is brought to public notice only intermittently. During this period, it flared up into angry clashes over casinos licences, class sizes in Queensland state schools, and Aboriginal land rights (see below). It could be seen also in the abortive attempt by members of the parliamentary party to oust Mr Vic. Sullivan, minister for commerce and industry, from the deputy leadership and to replace him with Mr Michael Ahern, the young minister for primary industry, who is said to be the organization's choice for the position. The premier's response to this challenge was to cancel the meeting of the parliamentary party at which the coup was to be attempted.

The Judiciary

When it finally came before cabinet for decision on 12 January, the appointment of the new chief justice precipitated a coalition crisis which ended in a fiasco for the Liberal party. The justice minister, Mr Doumany's short list of candidates was headed by the name of Mr Justice Douglas, the person whom he and his party consistently had supported for the position, as against the premier's nominee, Mr Justice Andrews. After lengthy and acrimonious debate, Mr Bjelke-Petersen accepted the second short-listed candidate, Sir Walter Campbell, as a compromise appointment. He moved immediately thereafter,

however, to confirm Andrews as Senior Puisne Judge and used the Nationals' numerical superiority in cabinet to over-ride Liberal objections to this decision.

On the 'flying minute' recommending the Andrews appointment, which was rushed to the Governor, the seven Liberal ministers signed a notation to the effect that 'we do not support this appointment' and their parliamentary leader, Dr Edwards, journeyed to Government House to explain their opposition to Sir James Ramsay. Speculation that a constitutional crisis was to hand was dispelled rapidly the following day when, at an executive council meeting, Sir James confirmed the appointment by signing the offending minute. Though Doumany had said he would resign if his nomination of Mr Justice Douglas were to be over-ruled, when it came to the crunch he backed down, commenting that 'I am not about to commit hara-kiri'.⁴ For all their pious protestations, the other Liberal ministers took no action either, though their party's state executive deliberated at length as to whether there should be an immediate withdrawal from the coalition. After much sabre-rattling and claims that the Nationals had broken the terms of the coalition agreement, the executive finally carried the motion that:

This executive gives notice to the executive of the National Party that it will not tolerate the National Party using its numbers in the Cabinet to implement its views against the total and expressed opposition of Liberal ministers. Should any further breach of the agreement or principles occur, the Liberal Party will regard the agreement as having been terminated by the National Party.

Senior members of the judiciary had the last say in the matter. Speakers at the valedictory ceremony for the retiring chief justice and senior puisne judge pointedly deplored government interference in the independence of the judiciary, and there were noticeable absentees from among the Bench present for the swearing-in ceremony of Mr Justice Andrews.

The class size issue

Early in the New Year, the Queensland teachers' union (QTU) took issue with the government over proposed amendments to the Education Act which, in its view, substantially increased ministerial power. The union complained also at the failure to implement certain recommendations of the Ahern select committee's report on education, including the establishment of school advisory councils and reduction in class sizes to a maximum of 25 students in classes 1 to 3 and 11 and 12, and of 30 students in grades 4 to 10. A survey taken by the union in the previous September had indicated gross over-crowding in 80 per cent of the state's primary school classes. The treasurer, Dr Edwards, argued that a further 2500 teachers at an estimated cost of \$45 million per year would be required to meet the union's demands.

As the first shot in its campaign for class-size reduction, the union directed teachers to refuse any education department move which could lead to larger classes. Support came from numerous parents' and citizens' associations and individual parents, many of whom kept their children away from school in protest against over-large classes. The education minister, Mr Gunn, threatened to take legal action against such parents and warned teachers who refused to teach over-size classes that they would be deemed to be on strike and would not be paid. The premier declared that his government was compiling a register of retired and unemployed teachers who would be used as strike-breakers if necessary, a proposal which received a negative response from the Retired Teachers' Association. Moral support for the QTU came from the Queensland Trades and Labor Council.

An escalation in the number of rolling stoppages by teachers throughout the state provoked Mr Bjelke-Petersen into ordering dismissal notices to be served on all teacher participants. The solicitor-general's department advised that the government had no legal authority to sack the teachers, and, with threats of a general strike hanging in the air, cabinet refused to support the premier's proposed action. The government offered to withdraw the dismissal notices in return for a QTU guarantee that no further industrial action would be undertaken on the class size issue. While this was not forthcoming immediately the QTU did halt its campaign, in expectation that September's state budget would provide the education department with additional funds sufficient to employ the extra teachers required to lower class sizes throughout the state.

The Male committee, set up by the government to investigate the introduction of 'human relations' subjects into state school curricula was expected to report in July. Meanwhile the director of education for the Catholic archdiocese announced that a sex education program, already on trial in a number of its schools, would be introduced gradually throughout the remainder.

Industrial relations

Statistics for internal migration within Australia for 1980-81 showed that Queensland received 26097 of the 33886 persons who moved interstate. These figures led the minister for employment, Sir William Knox, to dwell enthusiastically on Queensland's ability to create jobs, a view which a confederation of industry spokesman found overly optimistic. State government blue collar workers commenced a campaign for a 35-hour week, spearheaded by the combined railway unions which began a series of 24-hour rail stoppages. An offer of a 38-hour week was rejected and in April railway workers and

hospital employees again imposed overtime bans or withdrew their labour in support of shorter working hours. The government withdrew its 38-hour offer and issued suspension notices to some hundreds of railway workers, while also threatening deregistration of some unions. The premier departed for New Zealand and conciliatory moves by the industrial commission brought about a return to work and a renewal of discussions with the government on its 38-hour week proposals. A 38-hour week for state government railway and other blue collar workers was approved in principle by cabinet, in the premier's absence, subject to trade-offs to be determined in future talks. These talks were discontinued on Mr Bjelke-Petersen's return and, at the end of the period under review, officials of 21 unions were meeting to determine what further action they would recommend to their members. A month earlier building workers were granted a 38-hour week by the state industrial commission and the state wheat board negotiated a similar agreement with members of the Australian workers' union.

Conservation and development

The Iwasaki-Sangyo company's tourist resort development at Yeppoon continued to attract criticism. Doubts which have been raised from time to time as to the true intentions of the company were fuelled by its apparent inability to keep to the terms of its agreement with the Queensland government and by rumours that the company was engaged in substantial land purchases in the area. It was reports of the latter kind which clearly led the treasurer, Dr Edwards, to call for an enquiry into the progress of the resort project. Almost immediately, however, he reversed his decision, claiming that the difficulties in tracing land ownership were insurmountable. It was surmised that the premier had pressured his deputy into this change of mind.

The government's call for tenders for a pulp and paper mill to be established in the Gympie-Maryborough district elicited only one response. This was from Australian Paper Manufacturers' Ltd, which originally had sought a site in the Caboolture-Bribie Island area and was now asking for a \$50 million subsidy to set up the new venture in the region designated by the government. The government refused APM's request but developers, environmental protection and other groups in the near North Coast area were not convinced that APM would not have its way eventually. Consequently they were supporting Groups Against Pulp (GAP) which was leading the protest movement to stop APM building the mill anywhere in the Sunshine Coast area.

State cabinet approved in principle a plan for private enterprise to construct a bridge from the mainland to North Stradbroke Island. In making this known to the public, Dr Edwards admitted that a South Korean company had offered to build such a bridge in return for 800 hectares of crown land on the island, to be used for residential development. Confirming that cabinet had rejected this offer, the treasurer reaffirmed that the government would not trade off island land for the bridge but envisaged an offer of franchise rights from a toll to the successful tenderer. The inhabitants of North Stradbroke Island, some 2000 strong, vehemently opposed the bridge plan.

Mr Lang Hancock, the Western Australian mining entrepreneur, pressed on with his plans for a coal empire in central Queensland, though the response, to date, from all concerned, except Mr Bjelke-Petersen, has been, at best, tepid. Hancock's scheme includes construction of a deep-water port at Port Clinton (to be renamed Port Petersen), building a private railway line from there to his coal lease near Alpha in the Galilee basin, loading facilities, towns and even a steel works. Cabinet vetoed the proposal two years ago and representatives of all major mining companies at a meeting last November reported that a feasibility study for Port Clinton indicated no immediate requirement for a further coal port in central Queensland. Both Mr Hancock and the Queensland premier have reputations as men who get much of their own way, so the future of Port Petersen may rest ultimately in the hands of the commonwealth government, as owners of the Shoalwater Bay army reserve, within whose boundaries the port and much of the proposed development lie.

Road toll

The mounting road toll, which included a marked increase in deaths and injuries caused by accidents involving semi-trailers, forced the government to take action. First, however, it refused to introduce random breath testing of motorists on the grounds that 'It is not a vote-winner: it gets people's backs up' (Mr Bjelke-Petersen) and that it was an infringement of civil liberties (the transport minister, Mr Lane).⁶ The government also made it clear that it would find unacceptable any moves by the federal government to force the states to introduce such tests. This had been mooted by Mr Bob Katter, chairman of the federal joint parliamentary committee on road safety, who, while a senior National party parliamentarian himself, and a Queenslander, admitted that he had been singularly unsuccessful in gaining the cooperation of the Queensland government. Cabinet did decide, however, to restrict the speed of semi-trailers to 90 km/h on the open road and 50 km/h in built-up areas and to lower the legal blood alcohol limit for drivers from 0.08 to 0.05 per cent. The latter decision coincided with the announcement by a local brewery that it would be introducing a more potent beer to the market in time for the commonwealth games.

Casinos

The government continued to procrastinate over its choice of casino licences. Allegations of political interference in the decision-making process flew thick and fast, many pertaining to the police minister, Mr Hinze, himself a member of the government committee which would make the final recommendations to cabinet. In late February, the licence for a North Queensland casino was awarded to Queensland's own industrialist, Sir Leslie Thiess, through his family company, Drayton Investments Pty Ltd. It will be located in Townsville. By this time it had become an open secret that the premier favoured one applicant while Dr Edwards and the Liberals favoured another. It was feared that Mr Bjelke-Petersen would override the recommendations of the expert inter-departmental committee, and, in the process, split the coalition. Sir Robert Sparkes warned that further delay would only lead to more adverse publicity and suggested that cabinet should be 'very largely guided' by the committee's recommendations.⁷ In the event, the long bitter battle was won by a consortium, headed by the Melbourne-based Jennings Industries, over the rival Kerry Packer consortium—Majura Robina. The last word on the whole extraordinary exercise probably was said by *The Age* which recorded it as 'a remarkable, idiosyncratic essay in public administration and political decision making'.⁸

Police

A spate of incidents which occurred during the past six months did little to strengthen confidence in the police or to enhance further the force's public image. In the first instance, the department dragged its feet in investigating the death in a driving accident on Mount Coot-tha of a young woman, while in the company of two on-duty constables. Allegations followed that the police commissioner, Mr Terry Lewis, had attempted to cover up a drink-driving charge against Sir Edward Lyons, a National party trustee. Two former police officers then went public on 'Nationwide' programs to tell of the involvement of senior officials in numerous illegal activities, including gambling, prostitution, the drug trade and organized crime. They declined an offer from police minister, Hinze, to discuss their charges with him, but indicated they were prepared to give evidence before a properly constituted independent inquiry into the force. Such an investigation was called for by the Liberal party's state president, Dr John Herron, and the Council for Civil Liberties. Both Hinze and the premier rejected these suggestions, but again Mr Bjelke-Petersen had second thoughts, prompted by pressure from his party organization. The government set up a Police Complaints Tribunal, consisting of Judge W. J. Carter of the District Court, Mr P. J. Rodgers, SM, and police union president, Senior Sergeant C. G. Chant. The function of the tribunal was to receive complaints against members of the force and to consider whether such complaints warranted investigation, either on its own initiative, or by an internal police inquiry. Despite publicity, the tribunal, to date, has had few complaints to deal with and none of a serious nature.

Commonwealth games and Aborigines

Preparations for the games proceeded in a climate of mounting media hysteria (which the government initially did nothing to abate) directed to their possible disruption by black activists and supporters of Aboriginal land rights. Wide publicity was given, for example, to unfounded claims by a police officer that a Maori 'colonel' was recruiting militant blacks for training in the North Queensland jungle for the purpose of turning the commonwealth games into 'a blood bath'. This was capped by the premier himself with an announcement that Aboriginal activists were being trained in terrorist tactics in Libya, a statement subsequently refuted by all Aboriginal leaders and the foreign affairs department in Canberra. Police checked ticket sales for the games, to keep dissidents from gaining entrance to any of the venues. Of greatest public concern, however, was the legislation being prepared by the government to control security on and off games sites. The police minister's disclaimer that the proposals were directed at terrorists alone was not borne out by the early drafts of the Bill. These appeared to be aimed at stifling 'legitimate domestic political protest' as they gave police unprecedented powers over citizens, as well as the right to declare a situation of emergency in any notified area. These extensive powers were extended to private security employees also. The controversial Commonwealth Games Bill, with 15 amendments, was passed, finally, on 9 March. Though 'watered down' a little from its original form, the Bill as passed into law in no way satisfied its critics. Though one amendment required the state government to advertise which areas were to be declared 'notified areas' under the Act, at time of writing this had not been done, nor had the regulations under the Act been made public. In the eyes of many, the Act itself was a provocation to demonstrate in Brisbane during the games.

The threat of a boycott of the games by black African member nations of the commonwealth on the issue of New Zealand's participation hung like a cloud over the preparations, but at a special meeting of the commonwealth games federation in London in May a decision to support the Brisbane games was taken. Training of special police squads in riot and crowd control proceeded. It was rumoured that they were to be issued with special batons of the type used to good effect by the New Zealand police last year

during the demonstrations associated with the Springbok rugby tour. The batons were claimed to be less harmful to people than the traditional type, but more effective for thrusting and jabbing.

A series of feature articles in the *Courier-Mail* in January called attention to Aboriginal land rights again, and several weeks later the Australian Council of Churches Aboriginal advisory group set aside \$25,000 for a land rights campaign to be concentrated in Queensland in coincidence with the commonwealth games. Meanwhile Mr Charles Perkins, chairman of the federal Aboriginal development commission, threatened disruption to the games unless Aboriginals in Queensland were granted land rights. The police minister, Mr Hinze, in turn, entered the argument, but when the dust from the verbal fracas settled it seemed that the commonwealth government, in secret talks with its Queensland counterpart, had been urging a relaxation of the latter's hard-line stand. Both sides were anxious to avoid confrontation on the land rights issue during the games and the consequential embarrassment to the Queensland and Australian governments.

By early March the government had moved to abolish the existing Aboriginal and islander community reserves and to approve proposals to give Aborigines restricted freehold tenure over these lands. Title to the reserve lands was to be given to local councils elected by the communities. Mineral rights were to remain with the Crown as, in effect, were the lands themselves, as the titles, vested in the councils under a 'deed of grant in trust', were to be made under the existing provisions of the state Land Act. This meant that the title could be revoked by the government at any time the relevant Land Act provisions were not complied with. In emphasizing this, the premier gave, as examples for probable revocation, drug growing and subversive activities. The federal minister for Aboriginal affairs, Senator Baume, welcomed the proposals, while awaiting more details of the scheme, though Aboriginal groups themselves appeared divided on the issue. Queensland's Catholic and Anglican bishops, meeting in conference, queried the extent of the consultation with the Aboriginal people claimed by the government. They also doubted that the 'deeds of grant in trust' provided adequate security of title, unless this was guaranteed by an act of Parliament.

Dissatisfaction with some aspects of the scheme were voiced also by Sir Robert Sparkes in a National party meeting, leading to a heated clash with the premier. Apparently Sir Robert wished the legislation to contain more specific definition of the transgressions which could lead to revocation of the deeds. In the joint government parties meeting changes were sought and agreed to, giving state Parliament the power to over-ride executive council revocation decisions. However, as passed by Parliament, the legislation appeared to contain a number of loopholes for executive action with regard to revocation. This was clearly the opinion of a Queen's Counsel commissioned by church leaders to comment on the Act, who reported that no security of tenure was offered in the legislation. The apprehensions of the church leaders were similar to those of the commonwealth government, which, in its strongest statement on the issue, gave an 'unequivocal guarantee' that it would over-rule the Queensland Aboriginal land rights legislation if it failed to provide 'security of tenure and integrity of the reserve land' for Aborigines.¹⁰ In speaking to the legislation during the Assembly debate, Mr Bjelke-Petersen asserted that the question was not about land rights but about Australia's defence and security. He claimed that the radical Aboriginal land rights movement was part of a Communist plot to create a separate black nation within Australia. He subsequently reverted to this theme at the launching of the book 'Red over Black' by former Communist party member, Mr Geoff McDonald.

The high court, by four votes to three, rejected the Queensland government's challenge to the Commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act. This cleared the way for the case brought by a group of Arukun Aboriginal residents against the Queensland government to proceed in the Queensland supreme court. At stake was the lease of the Archer River pastoral holding, the sale of which to the Aboriginal Land Fund Commission on behalf of the Arukun group has been blocked by the Queensland government.

Local government elections

After what the *Australian* claimed to be 'one of the most inept and boring campaigns in the history of local politics',¹¹ local authority elections throughout the state took place on 27 March. Interest centred on the Brisbane City Council poll where the Liberal party was making a concerted bid to break the ALP's 21-year hold on that institution. With the National party standing candidates in five wards and the Australian Democrats contesting four, some of the essential ingredients for a lively campaign appeared to be present, but it was not to be. The leaders of the major contesting teams, vice-mayor Alderman Harvey (ALP) and Alderman Olsen (Liberal) both had serious identity problems. Labor lacked its well known Lord Mayor, Frank Sleeman, who retired at the election while the Liberals had failed earlier to promote to the leadership position their greatest asset in Alderman Sallyanne Atkinson. The campaigns, like the leaders, were lack-lustre, producing a status quo result in seats won. Both Labor and Liberal percentages of the vote were marginally down, two and four per cent respectively; the Democrats achieved three per cent while the Nationals polled four per cent overall and their only sitting alderman, Ray Smith, a recent

convert from the Liberal party, lost his Chermshire ward. Labor polled strongly in the provincial cities, particularly in Townsville and Rockhampton.

NOTES

1. *Australian*, 6 February 1982.
2. *Courier-Mail*, 4 June 1982.
3. *Sunday Mail*, 28 March 1982.
4. *The Age*, 15 January 1982.
5. *Courier-Mail*, 15 January 1982.
6. *Australian*, 13 April 1982.
7. *Ibid.*, 8 March 1982.
8. *The Age*, 10 March 1982.
9. *Ibid.*, 24 February 1982.
10. *Australian*, 2 April 1982.
11. *Australian*, 27 March 1982.

M.N.B.C.