



Queensland 1978 – Background

Background to the release of the 1978 Cabinet Minutes

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The Cabinet Minutes do not record several major political events of 1978. In October, the Liberal Party Leader and Deputy Premier, Bill Knox, stepped aside following several earlier challenges and a barrage of newspaper reports that he would be dumped as leader. On one occasion he used his casting vote to prevent a challenge being brought on in the party room. [For example, *Courier-Mail*, 5 June, p. 1, 4 Aug., p. 10, 9 Sept., p. 13, 21 Sept. p. 15, 6 Oct. p. 1] He was replaced by Dr Llew Edwards, the Minister for Health, but retained the Treasury portfolio (for the moment). On the other side of the political fence the Labor Leader, Tom Burns, resigned (though he was under no pressure to do so) following a poor showing by Labor in a by-election for the seat of Sherwood. Ed Casey, who was unopposed, took over the Opposition leadership. [*Courier-Mail*, 29 November, p.1]

The ban on street marches in Queensland caused increasing tensions between the Coalition partners, though unlike the previous year, it was not the subject of any Cabinet decision. The Liberal Party organisational wing voted for a new policy [*Courier-Mail*, 4 June, p. 3], while the leaders of the major churches spoke out against it also, and were in turn denounced by the Premier. [*Courier-Mail* 16 March, p. 1] In December, protesters held a major rally during which it was reported that 346 people were arrested by police. This was the biggest number of arrests at a demonstration during the year, but it did not match the record 418 arrested in October the previous year. However, marches also took place in many other cities and towns – “After almost 2,000 people were taken into custody in 26 separate confrontations, then fined or imprisoned at enormous administrative cost, the struggle arrived at an exhausted truce rather than decisive victory for either side.” [*A History of Queensland*, Raymond Evans, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 224] Two of those arrested in the Brisbane march were federal Labor politicians, Senator George Georges and Tom Uren. Senator Georges later spent 24 hours in jail, until a benefactor paid his fine. [*Courier-Mail*, 8, 14 and 15 December]. Throughout, the Premier resolutely refused to consider any changes to the law. [*Courier-Mail*, 19 July, p. 1; 12 Dec., p. 3] The new Opposition Leader declared that street marches were not a winner for the Labor Party. [*Courier-Mail*, 29 Nov., p. 1]

Another source of tension earlier in the year was the Premier’s support for a former doctor who provided cancer “treatment” for patients at a clinic in the Cook Islands, Milan Brych. [*Courier-Mail*, 13 Feb, p. 7] The Health Minister, Dr Edwards, strongly opposed the Government providing any support for Brych, and the Federal Government initially refused to provide him with a visa. [*Courier-Mail*, 24 Feb., p. 9]. The Premier offered to send an aircraft to bring him to Queensland, and supported the idea of Brych establishing a clinic in

Queensland. [*Courier-Mail*, 2 and 3 March and 1 April, p. 1] The *Courier-Mail* reported there was a clash in Cabinet over Brych, with Ministers supporting Dr Edwards, though no decision was recorded. [4 April, p. 1]

A serious split occurred over Cabinet's decision to build a new power station to supply electricity in Queensland. Cabinet overruled a recommendation of the Minister and the relevant authority to build the power station at Tarong, in the Premier's electorate. According to the *Courier-Mail* ("Tarong, but its wrong says Camm"), Cabinet split 10-7, with one Liberal Minister supporting the majority National Ministers. [*Courier-Mail*, 14 February, p. 1]

The Labor Party also had its difficulties. The Federal ALP threatened to intervene in the affairs of the Queensland branch unless it was reformed and this was supported by the federal leader, Bill Hayden. [*Courier-Mail*, 1 Aug. and 3 Dec.]

The Queensland economy was under stress during the year, showing the highest jobless rate in the nation at the beginning of the year, with an unemployment rate of 7.56 percent. [*Courier-Mail*, 7 January, p. 1] The State mid-year quarterly economic review presented to the Cabinet showed the Consumer Price Index had risen by 8.2 per cent over the previous year and the minimum wage by 5.04 per cent, while car sales were down by about 5 per cent, as were new dwelling construction figures. There was a deficit of just over \$1 million in the State accounts contrasted with a budgeted surplus of almost \$400,000. [Sub. 25899, 25 Aug.]

Several important construction projects were concluded. The new office and accommodation block for Queensland politicians adjacent to Parliament House was finished at a cost of about \$20 million, about three times greater than the original estimate. The new rail bridge across the Brisbane River and the electrification of the suburban rail system changed the whole pattern of commuting by rail in the city. The first train passed over the Merivale Bridge on 17 November.

Nationally, the most sensational event was the explosion of a bomb outside the Hilton Hotel in Sydney during a Commonwealth Heads of Government Regional Meeting. Three people died. The Fraser Government appointed former Governor-General Sir John Kerr to be Australian Ambassador to UNESCO, but he relinquished the post less than a month later. Sir Robert Menzies died in May. The Federal Government announced plans to build a new airport in Brisbane close to the existing airport at Eagle Farm. It was scheduled to be operational by 1986.

Some reports from 1978 might seem oddly familiar to readers of newspapers today. In July Australia was warned that it must cut its use of fuel. In November it was reported there had been an alarming rise in the number of teenage drunks and that four out of ten, 12 to 20 year-olds regularly got drunk.

Griffith University celebrated the bestowal of its first PhD on Peter Coaldrake, who is now Vice-Chancellor of the Queensland University of Technology.