

11-1-2013

# WALTER CAMPBELL: A DISTINGUISHED LIFE

Geoff Barlow  
gff.barlow@gmail.com

Jim Corkery  
Bond University, jcorkery@bond.edu.au

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.bond.edu.au/odsej>

 Part of the [Judges Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Geoff Barlow and Jim Corkery. (2013) "WALTER CAMPBELL: A DISTINGUISHED LIFE" *Owen Dixon Society eJournal*, .

<http://epublications.bond.edu.au/odsej/8>

# WALTER CAMPBELL: A DISTINGUISHED LIFE

BY GEOFF BARLOW AND JF CORKERY

This is the third of three articles<sup>1</sup> on the life and work of Sir Walter Campbell, Queensland jurist and Governor. This article examines Walter Campbell's family background, his education, marriage, air force days, his experiences as Governor and his wide-ranging interests. It concludes with an assessment of the impact of his multi-faceted life.

Sir Walter Campbell is well remembered for his term as the Governor of Queensland, particularly for his deft and effective handling of the state's 1987 constitutional crisis, when Premier Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen refused to resign after losing the support of his party. Campbell's career, however, intersected with a range of historical events, including political, legal, constitutional, diplomatic and even military incidents of significance to the nation. His path crossed those of many notable figures on the national and international stage. This article, the third in a series on Campbell's life and achievements, examines some of these lesser-known moments in Sir Walter's career.

## **The Campbells in Australia – a distinguished history**

Sir Walter Campbell, of Scottish ancestry, was proud of his heritage. His Coat of Arms, given to him by the Court of the Lord Lyon in Scotland, was one of his cherished possessions. Volumes could be written of the history of the famous clan and Sir Walter could readily detail this history back to the 13th century. A brief summary of Campbell's Australian forbears reveals some remarkable intersections with well-known names and events in both the old and new countries.

Sir Walter's great-great grandfather, Colonel John Campbell of Lochend, was an accomplished military man and farming authority who brought his wife Annabella and their eight children to Australia on a chartered ship, the *Lusitania*, in 1821. Extending the family was a married daughter, accompanied by her husband and their three children.

Facing the advancing clearance of the Highlands and hard economic circumstances across much of Scotland, the Colonel had turned his sights on a grant of land in New South Wales, his attention caught partly because he was related by marriage to pioneering Governor Lachlan Macquarie. Leaving his family in Hobart after a five month journey around the Cape of Good

---

<sup>1</sup> The first two articles are published in this Journal: The first article in the series is entitled Sir Walter Campbell: Queensland Governor and his role in Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen's resignation, 1987 <<http://epublications.bond.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1004&context=odsej>>. The second article: Geoff Barlow and JF Corkery, "Sir Walter Campbell - Judge, CJ, and University Chancellor" (2011) *Owen Dixon Society eJournal* <http://epublications.bond.edu.au/odsej/7>.

Hope, John Campbell arrived in Sydney on 30 November 1821 - St Andrew's Day, appropriately enough. In March the following year, his expectations of a land grant were fulfilled. He was granted 2000 acres at Eastern Creek (near the present site of Blacktown), where his family was re-united in April 1822.

With the help of convict labour, the property called "Bungarribee" (which Campbell named from the local Aboriginal dialect) was soon cultivated and transformed, with tenced pasture, into an orchard, pig-sties and dairy, and a substantial house that lasted some 130 years. The homestead survives now only in paintings and the pages of publications such as James Broadbent's *The Australian Colonial House* (1997) and David Latta's *Lost Glories* (1986). It was immortalised in the Charles Chauvel film *Heritage*, before making way for a telecommunications station in 1957.

In the intervening years, John Campbell and his wife Annabella established a solid base from which an enterprising and public-spirited family could grow and make their mark in a new land. In 1824, John Campbell was made a Justice of the Peace and, in 1825, he became a joint Commissioner of Crown Lands. Though Annabella died in 1826 and John a year later, their family legacy had been passed on. Their son-in-law, Archibald McLeod, did stints as Superintendent of Agriculture at Bathurst and Norfolk Island and as a Magistrate at Parramatta, and later crossed the high country and established "Bairnsdale" Station in Victoria (where the city of that name stands today). Patrick Frederick Campbell, John Campbell's fourth son, was an innkeeper and Deputy Surveyor of Bridges for New South Wales, and his son Benjamin Bruce Campbell, born 1835, eventually became the owner of Cubbo Station in the Namoi River region of New South Wales. It was on this grazing property, in 1885, that Sir Walter's father, Archie, was born.

Legend, myth and historical fact often swirl together in the mists of Scottish heritage and, despite his strong grasp of practical matters, Sir Walter Campbell showed in many speeches and in personal interviews that he was thoroughly at home with the romance of his family history. Amongst the possessions brought by the first Campbells to Australia was a mahogany writing desk from "Kingsburgh House" on the Isle of Skye (the famous residence where Bonnie Prince Charlie was sheltered by Flora MacDonald and also where Samuel Johnson and James Boswell stayed during their celebrated trip to the Hebrides).

The desk had been reportedly used by the Prince during his stay at the house, and though it was taken back to Scotland in 1865 (by Annabella Boswell), it was in Campbell hands for roughly 50 years. Colonel John Campbell of Lochend was for 19 years a "tachsman", or tenant, in Kingsburgh House, where all his family were born, and he apparently took the desk with him on his move to the family property near Appin in Argyllshire, after his father's death in 1816. The desk stayed at Lochend — a small estate named by John Campbell's father after his original home on the shores of the Lake of Monteith in Perthshire — until the move to Australia.

Sir Walter evoked the mystical associations of these historical connections in speeches at both the Society of St Andrew of Scotland Annual Dinner, on 1 December 1995, and to the Corps of Commissionaires, Irish Club, Brisbane, on 6 November 1998:

I remember the eerie feeling I had when I drove through the gates and down the tree-lined drive of “Kingsborough House” on the Isle of Skye, the house in which my Great-Grandfather was born.... Ghostly shadows which I then saw and sensed about that house were not just part of the swirling mists and the weird gloom of Skye — I was for a while suspended between present reality and remoter times. For a brief interlude, I had an uncanny sense of the past, but I am sure that many of you have had similar experiences.

### **Walter Campbell goes to school**

Within the yellowing pages of Downlands College *Annual Magazine* for 1940, the Right Reverend JB Roper, DD, Bishop of Toowoomba, pays tribute to its outstanding student of the previous year : “Last year, which was but the tenth of our existence, we are pleased to recall that Walter Campbell, the Dux of the College, secured five A’s and three B’s in the Senior Public Examination, and also was awarded one of the eighteen University Scholarships which are available to competitors throughout the state”.<sup>2</sup>

Downlands College was then a cluster of buildings based around a large, late 19<sup>th</sup> century house, which in 1915 had grown an extra storey to become the stone and brick mansion known as “Tyson Manor”. It was situated just two miles from the centre of Toowoomba — then as now a thriving city on the edge of Queensland’s Darling Downs. In 1940, its 180 students had access to 50 acres of playing fields.

This spacious outdoor environment, with its clear, bracing air, frosty winter nights and cool summer breezes, had a stimulating effect on young Walter Campbell. In that Senior Public Examination of 1939, he achieved the then very rare “A” passes in Latin, Mathematics (A), Mathematics (B), Chemistry and Logic, with “B” class passes in English, French and Ancient History. Campbell also excelled on the sports field, as noted in an article in the *Queensland Bar News* of December 1985: “He was Downlands’ most vocal football player and his robust style of play as hooker for the first XV left an impression (in many ways) on his opponents.”

The successes of Walter’s school years were never easily won, however. The death of his mother Leila, at an early age was a devastating loss to the family of three boys. It disrupted their schooling. For a time, the Campbell boys moved to Northern New South Wales to be close to their maternal grandparents, and Walter went to boarding school in Lismore, before making the move back to Toowoomba and Downlands.

Leila Campbell, the descendant of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Irish immigrants, was a devout Catholic. Her preference for Catholic education prevailed throughout her sons’ schooling. Walter’s first

---

<sup>2</sup> Right Reverend JB Roper, ‘Annual Report’ (1940) 10 Downlands Magazine 3.

school was a Toowoomba Christian Brothers convent, where he sat for the all-important Scholarship exam at the age of 11, alongside boys of 13 and 14. “They skipped at least a year with me,” Campbell recalled.<sup>3</sup> He was sick at the time of the examinations and had to be supervised by a nurse, but passed nonetheless and went into the sub-junior year at Christian Brothers in 1933, the year his mother passed away.

At 12 years of age, in the care of his maternal grandmother, Walter attended a convent in the Tweed River district. There, he sat for the local Diocesan exams and won a bursary providing five years’ free education at Woodlawn College, a Marist Brothers’ school at Lismore. Patrick, eldest of the Campbell brothers, had been at Downlands as a boarder throughout 1933. With Walter’s achievement of the Woodlawn bursary, it was decided that all three boys would move south and enrol at the Lismore college. For reasons he later found hard to identify, though, Campbell was never totally happy there. “I think I thought it was rather a little small fry – it’s hard to say now,” he said in 1999.<sup>4</sup>

This dissatisfaction was what drove Walter Campbell’s decision to return to Toowoomba when his eldest brother Patrick moved to Gatton Agricultural College, and his younger brother returned there also. “In the middle of 1937 I became a boarder at Downlands in what was then my sub-senior year”.<sup>5</sup> The change was good for Campbell. In 1938, he completed his senior year and was made Dux of the School.

He returned in 1939 at the urging of the school administrators, who believed that he could get one of the 18 scholarships granted each year to attend the University of Queensland. In a time of fierce rivalry between Catholic and non-Catholic schools, Campbell lived up to all expectations, becoming the first student from Downlands to win an open scholarship. While the family money would have been sufficient to fully educate all three boys, the achievement of the scholarship was clearly a morale booster, both for himself and his school.

Arts subjects held pride of place at Downlands; science was not its forte. That suited Walter Campbell. Despite regretting never studying physics, his major interests – history, literature and art – were stimulated and encouraged in the school environment. Although he achieved higher grades for Maths A and Chemistry than he did for English and History in the 1939 Senior Examination, Campbell’s passion for the arts began early and never waned. He read widely amongst the classics, with a particular fondness for Shakespeare, Scott and Dickens. He soaked up Wordsworth and Tennyson. In later years, he could recite verses from Rupert Brooke without a stumble. However, Australian literature – even the bush poets Paterson and Lawson – were largely ignored throughout Campbell’s schooling. Only after the War did he become interested in home-grown writers.

---

<sup>3</sup> JF Corkery, Interview with Sir Walter and Lady Campbell (Brisbane, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

At school, Walter excelled at Latin, wrote poetry — some of which survives — and co-founded the school magazine at Woodlawn. *The Eagle* was the brainchild of Campbell and Peter Lawler (who was also later knighted and became the head of a Federal Government department). Though tame by 21<sup>st</sup> century standards, the magazine demonstrates an early flowering of the Campbell wit — a “wag” spirit illustrated by jokes reprinted from *The Bulletin* and other journals, which eventually resulted in censorship by the Woodlawn priests. Recalled Campbell: “this joke was about a fellow who must have been the son of an alcoholic and had a bit too much to drink and it ended up that he “swallowed in his father’s footsteps””. And it was blotted out from *The Eagle* ...which they told us was sent to Rome”.<sup>6</sup> The upstart journal eventually folded, though its name lived on. *The Eagle* became the title of Woodlawn’s annual magazine.

While Campbell exhibited the same enthusiasm and energy on the sports field as he did in the classroom, these were tough times, lived in the shadows of world depression and the gathering storms of war. While the economic crises of the 1920s and 1930s failed to dent the family’s standard of living appreciably, it did affect the income of the live-in help. “We always had a maid,” Campbell remembered. “During the depression years, my mother reduced her salary by five shillings per week. This caused the maid to be very upset”.<sup>7</sup>

The family’s good fortune was shared in other ways, however. “My father was a very generous man,” Campbell said. “During those depression years, my mother had two boys — sons of a returned soldier — come over from the Christian Brothers’ school to lunch with us every day. The mother of the two boys was deceased. We would have a full lunch - not just sandwiches”.<sup>8</sup>

### *Campbell’s RAAF Career*

Walter Campbell suspended his law studies at the University of Queensland upon his call-up in 1941. For the next four years, his career shifted to the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). In a 1998 speech to the Corps of Commissionaires at the Brisbane Irish Club, Campbell recalled: “things were pretty grim in those days and I became, for a couple of months, the rear gunner in a four man crew in Anson aircraft with 67 Squadron, which was then quickly established. At that time we were occupied in doing operational anti-submarine patrols in the Ansons along the South-East Queensland coast, as well as spending a lot of time digging slit trenches”.

Campbell retained vivid memories of the arrival of 2500 American servicemen — the first to come to Australia — who were diverted after the Pearl Harbor attack from planned deployment in the Phillipines to Amberley Air Base near Ipswich, Queensland. “They had Kittyhawks (P40s) in crates,” he told the Corps of Commissionaires, “and up they came to Amberley where the aircraft were uncrated.” Many of the American pilots were achingly young – some only 18 years old - and inexperienced. With no provision for dual instruction on the Kittyhawks, a large

---

<sup>6</sup> JF Corkery, Interview with Sir Walter and Lady Campbell (Brisbane, 1999)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

number crashed in the Amberley area, with considerable loss of life. It was a sobering experience for budding airmen of the region.

Among Sir Walter's many recollections of that dark, dangerous yet exciting era, some were lighter and reflective of the trans-Pacific cultural differences which then existed. The US had forged ahead in trade and business. The American soldiers were better-paid, better-dressed and seemed rather more sophisticated than the Australians:

In those pre-TV days, we were obviously much more naïve and far less sophisticated than are the 19 and 20 year olds of today. We thought it strange, and just not proper, when we saw Americans saluting without headgear, and we were very envious of their smart, well-tailored uniforms when compared to ours, and of their well-stocked messes and canteens. They introduced us to Coca-Cola, of which, together with ice cream, they seemed to consume an amazing quantity. We were fascinated not only by the sophisticated American aircraft, but also by so much of the other advanced equipment which the Americans brought out, such as bulldozers and machinery to put down metal landing strips and so on, which were all very foreign to us.

Campbell displayed a natural aptitude at the controls of an aircraft. He was soon commissioned and posted to Central Flying School at Camden in New South Wales to do a flying instructor's course. Achieving this status quickly, he was posted to No 7 Elementary Flying School, Launceston, Tasmania, where he would start training others. It was there — as Angus Innes, former Queensland Liberal Leader, notes — that Campbell struck up a lifelong friendship with author and poet Geoffrey Dutton, also a flying instructor.<sup>9</sup> In his autobiography *Out in the Open*, Dutton pays tribute to "Wally" as a former "student radical who loved to argue, with such skill and anticipation that it did not surprise me when he rose to the top of his profession."

### **Walter Campbell marries Georgina Pearce**

Walter Campbell first met Georgina Pearce while browsing the shelves of McLeod's Bookshop in Elizabeth Street, Brisbane. He was in the company of another young woman, Daphne Fogarty, who introduced him to her friend Georgina, then a second year teachers' college student buying books for the new academic year. She was immediately interested in the young flyer, who was sporting a moustache, sideburns and, then, "plenty of thick hair".<sup>10</sup>

The following week, after seeing Daphne off on a train trip to North Queensland, Walter Campbell asked Georgina at the station if he could give her a ride home. Georgina thought this was "very forward", but in keeping with the pilots' image as the dashing elite among the servicemen. The confident and personable Walter soon became an energetic and welcome suitor, who gave Georgina very little time to herself after their first meeting. They became

---

<sup>9</sup> Angus Innes, 'Sir Walter Campbell', 2000 June *Shoulder to Shoulder* 6.

<sup>10</sup> JF Corkery, Interview with Sir Walter and Lady Campbell (Brisbane, 1999).

engaged in Easter 1942. A photo of the good-looking young woman appeared in the engagements section in the local newspaper above the caption "Miss Georgina Pearce (186 Moray Street, New Farm) to Pilot Officer W.B. Campbell R.A.A.F., Camden". Less reverent newspaper reports dubbed her "Pretty little Georgie" and explained that the bride to be "had to shop on coupons" in wartime Brisbane.

Georgina had come from a farming family outside Toowoomba. She showed an independent streak early on and was well used to the open and vigorous life of the farm. As a girl, she would ride to the local school on horseback, three miles each way. She wanted to sit for the scholarship exam in the final year of primary school, so she shifted to another school, closer to Toowoomba. This meant yet further travel each day. She still had to ride the horse three miles to the railway station, catching the rail motor, then walk a mile from the station to the school.

She was a good student and had ambitions, rare for the time, of attending university. After attending the Teachers' Training College in Turbot Street, Brisbane, she started teaching in 1942 and was asked to specialise in speech training. In this pioneering work, Georgina Pearce and a few colleagues would train a few students in several schools about Brisbane. They also drilled the children in getting into the school ground trenches and told them of other preparations for the event of an air strike. Australia was at war.

### **Campbell's Air Force days**

Walter and Georgina married on 18 June 1942 at All Saints Church. The UQ student newspaper farewelled its former editor in typical style:

EX "SEMPER" ED. WEDS

Deep sympathy will be felt throughout the University at the marriage of Pilot Officer Wally Campbell, which took place at All Saints Church yesterday afternoon. Lucky girl is Georgina Pearce. Georgina, as we knew her, must indeed be lucky, since anyone who believed half the stories Campbell used to tell will understand that he had hundreds to pick from.

Wally will be well known to all but freshers. In 1941 he edited "Semper" until his call up in June, making himself famous during that period by adroit publicity. And with our usual soft regard for former "Semper" editors, we reluctantly say farewell to Casanova Campbell, and hello and best of luck to sedate, married, Goodman Walter.

With his clean cut looks, slicked dark hair and powerful physique, Campbell fitted the style of leading men of the period, Clark Gable and Errol Flynn, whom he resembled somewhat in his flying officer's dress jacket and pencil moustache. A photograph of him with fellow RAAF recruits standing to attention on Southport Beach, Gold Coast shows them, Campbell in particular, in the prime of youth. That was to change for several of them all too soon.

The Launceston press welcomed the Campbells to Tasmania in the style of the day: "A lovely newcomer to our city is Mrs Campbell, whose husband, Pilot Officer Campbell, is stationed at



Western Junction.” For parts of 1942 and 1943, Walter was busy training young pilots in fabric-covered Tiger Moth aeroplanes, while Georgina went teaching. This ended when Walter’s training aircraft crashed spectacularly.

Campbell was in the front seat in the biplane, a flying student behind him. They were practising forced landings when, in the student’s hands, the plane ploughed into the landing strip, destroying the machine. The student was relatively unscathed but Campbell was badly injured. He shattered the tibia and fibula at the knee joint of his right knee, injuries that practically ended his sports capacity and affected his general mobility for the rest of his life.

Georgina was phoned at school by the Commanding Officer. At the hospital she found her new husband trussed up in bed, blackened from oil and petrol — he had been trapped under the wrecked plane — and grass-stained from his impact with the landing strip. His nose was broken and his leg shattered. The surgeon, Doctor Craig, called at Campbell’s bedside after the operation on the knee. He told the young man that, fit and healthy as he was, he would never bend the knee again. Certainly, he would not fly again. Campbell defied both predictions. He worked hard at restoring his mobility and piled on the physiotherapy. Little by little mobility returned, though the foot nerves had been severed and the foot was practically paralyzed.

In due course, with unrelenting drive, he regained his freedom of movement. He was even able to run again. He was 11 months recuperating. Making best use of the time, he resumed his studies — he had attended the University of Queensland for one year in 1940 — and took Bachelor of Arts exams, from his hospital bed. He graduated and was back flying by the end of 1943.

### **The Cowra Connection**

Campbell returned to the Central Flying School, which had been relocated from Camden to Parkes, New South Wales, and it was from there that he was plunged into the aftermath of the greatest escape attempt in the history of the war — the Cowra Breakout. On 5 August 1944, at a prison camp outside the New South Wales town of Cowra, over 1000 Japanese Prisoners of War simply charged the barrier fences. Many fell to machine gun fire, but almost 350 got over the fence by standing on the bodies of dead or injured fellow countrymen and ran off into the bush. Campbell was among the pilots called in to search for the escapees. In a 1998 speech, he recalled:

I was flying an Air Speed Oxford and went looking for them, flying at low level. I saw several parties of them running through the fairly open scrub, and indeed saw some who had committed Hari Kari swinging from the trees. Over 200 Japanese were killed, but the whole incident was clouded in secrecy then and for many years afterwards.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Sir Walter Campbell, ‘Speech to Corps of Commissionaires’ (Delivered at the Irish Club, Brisbane, Friday 6 November 1998).

## General Blamey and the Japanese Surrender at Morotai

Campbell finished the war much closer to home. He was in charge of 102 Special Purpose Squadron based at Cecil Plains, on the Darling Downs. As Station Commander, Campbell's role was to provide ferry services to the islands north of Australia, using the highly-advanced, four-engined Liberators. Shortly after the end of the war, Campbell was at Morotai, dropping supplies by *storpadoes* to Prisoner of War camps, and ferrying troops back to Australia. He was among those lined up on the strip at Morotai when General Blamey took the surrender of the Japanese forces in the Halmaheras and the Celebes. Campbell recalled in 1998:

The Japanese flew in from Ceram in a patched-up "Betty" — a Japanese bomber aircraft — and then I think about a dozen of them climbed out and lined up beside the aircraft. I recall that they all appeared to be over six feet in height, and this was symptomatic of the face-saving characteristic of the Japanese Army. They had obviously been carefully selected. The signing took place at a small table on the strip where General Blamey was seated.<sup>12</sup>

On the journey back from Morotai to Australia, Sir Walter experienced what he described as his "hairiest time" as a pilot. With around 36 people on board — including some who were ill and some who had been wounded in Borneo — the plane virtually lost two engines ("an engine and three quarters", as Campbell put it) over the Arafura Sea halfway between Morotai and Darwin. To compound the problem, there were far too few parachutes to go around.

Asked if some passengers would have jumped if the means had been available, Campbell was adamant: "No, they wouldn't have. As far as I was concerned the Captain would have made all stay on board until we ditched, I would think. Because we had a truncated crew, we cut our crew down from 11 to five so we could fit more people aboard ... passengers, you know." Campbell had vivid memories of limping back to Darwin at 2000 feet, after throwing all the armour plating overboard.

## Master of Arts — reading philosophy and saving the world

Wrote Campbell to friend Daniel Hart in 1998, "in 1946 we all ... had ideas about reshaping the world". In 1999, in his taped recollections, he also recalled a desire to change things. "My aim at the university was to do philosophy, and I ended up doing an MA in philosophy... I thought that philosophy would solve all the problems of the world..."

Walter Campbell's first degree was in the arts faculty. Dr Elsie Campbell Harwood, his lecturer in philosophy, would claim that Campbell was the best student she ever had. Professors Billy Kyle and Walter Harrison wanted Campbell to publish his 50,000 word thesis on *Utilitarianism and its Effect on Legal and Political Theory*, but despite their encouragement and an offer of a job as a lecturer, Campbell chose instead to fast track his legal career. That the well-crafted thesis never became a book is to some a matter of regret. Professor David Field of Bond University

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

thought Sir Walter's thesis "captured beautifully" the era of socio-economic upheaval which spawned Marx, Chartism and the First Reform Bill.

### **Law Studies in a Cold War climate**

Walter Campbell's law school studies were not at all like modern legal education. There were no crowded classrooms or queues for library seats and books. Computers and the internet were still the stuff of science fiction. When war broke out, there were two lecturers in law and no professors. With no more than a dozen law students in the annual intakes throughout the 1940s, a brilliant trio - Harry Gibbs, Walter Campbell and, the year behind, Peter Connolly - shone brightly. Like Tom Matthews before them, they all achieved 1<sup>st</sup> class honours, among the first to receive this distinction in the history of the university.

Most law lectures were held in the Old Government House building in George Street, central Brisbane. The standard format was the European model of tertiary instruction. The lecturer would stand at the lectern and deliver formal lectures, sometimes handing out notes, run off by hand on the old "roneo", wet ink machines. Harry Gibbs, who finished his law studies before Campbell, soon became a part-time lecturer in the Law School, although he did not lecture Campbell in any subjects.

It was within this cloistered environment that Walter Campbell was elected President of the Law Students' Society in 1946. He immediately set out to widen his fellow students' horizons. With his trademark ebullience and enthusiasm, he managed to get Sir Owen Dixon, Australia's premier jurist at the time, along to speak to the students. His greatest coup was, though, inviting along a Russian lawyer, who was also a leading member of the Russian revolutionary elite.

It was known only to very few that Aleksandr Fyodorovich Kerensky was living in Brisbane while his Australian wife, Nelle Tritton, was at her parents' home, suffering with cancer. His was one of the romantic and more respected names of what was to prove the most momentous popular revolution of the 20th century. Kerensky had, with great bravery and considerable eloquence, opposed the Tsarist government in the Russian Duma of 1912.

During World War I, with Russia pitting itself against the Germans, Kerensky briefly became minister of justice, then minister of war. He emerged as head of the provisional government of Russia in the revolution year, 1917, for a few months. He had wished Russia to pursue the war against Germany, an unpopular decision. By contrast, Lenin, the Bolshevik leader, was keen to end the conflict for Russia, and the Germans saw to it that Lenin was given easy passage across Germany to Russia so that he could assume control, once the revolution against the Tsarist government started.

The victorious Bolsheviks threw Kerensky out of office and into exile in October 1917. First, he went to Paris and then, after some time in Australia and Europe, resided in the US until his death in 1970. Most of this time, Kerensky lived in fear of a vindictive Communist leadership. In

1940, long after the stormy years of the Revolution, they had, after all, assassinated his famous colleague Leon Trotsky in Mexico — with an ice axe into the head.

Kerensky's wife Nelle, a former journalist, came home to Australia in November 1945. The couple lived with her well off parents, Frederick and Eliza Tritton, in Nelle's childhood home, "Elderslie" in Clayfield. She passed away on 10 April 1946 at the age of 46, leaving a broken-hearted Kerensky, 20 years her senior, unable even to write about it.

Hearing Kerensky was in Brisbane, student leader Walter Campbell had phoned a contact phone number he had obtained and left a message, asking to meet the deposed Russian prime minister. Kerensky returned the call some days later. He arranged to meet Campbell outside the old Criminal Investigation Branch, adjoining Queens Park in George Street. They met and chatted on a park bench, Campbell believing that "we were under constant surveillance". Kerensky agreed to address the students' Labor Club at the campus. His car was accompanied to the university by a police motorcycle escort. It must have been only a few days before his wife, Nelle, died.

On 14 May 1946, the students' newspaper at the University of Queensland, *Semper Floreat*, reported the visit of this articulate and famous figure. "It is seldom that this University is honoured by a visit from anyone of such historical renown," the paper intoned, "and it may be safely said that there were few among the audience who were not profoundly impressed by the experience."

### **Walter Campbell — student radical?**

Those heady days of Campbell's student life would not easily be forgotten. Some 45 years later, his alleged radical tendencies became the subject of considerable media attention, as journalists speculated on possible Vice-Regal involvement if the 1986 Queensland election resulted in a hung Parliament. The idea of State Governor Sir Walter Campbell being a closet leftie held irresistible appeal for the press. Of special interest was the hoary editorial quote from Walter in *Semper Floreat*: "The new social order will be born out of the blood of traitors and over the graves of the greedy."

A story that Walter had joined the university's Communist Party branch, with the sole intention of disbanding it, also got a good run. However, in an article entitled "Queensland Governor may decide the state's future", in *The Age* (Melbourne) of 28 October 1986, Damien Murphy reported that past members of the CPA in Queensland could not recall Walter Campbell as an active member and membership records had been burnt during the Menzies Government's attempts to ban the party.

### **A Governor for all seasons**

Sir Walter was sworn in as Governor of Queensland on 22 July 1985, a day when ceremony and controversy vied for ascendancy. In language redolent of an earlier era, newspapers recorded

the pageantry of the changeover, particularly the trumpet fanfares and 19 gun salutes which farewelled the outgoing Vice-Regal couple, Sir James and Lady Ramsay, from Brisbane airport in the morning, and welcomed Sir Walter and Lady Campbell to Government House in the afternoon.

The scenes of deference and pomp over which Campbell presided soon began to show hints of impishness and levelling good humour. No occasion was so grand, no guest so important, no moment too grave for that to disappear entirely. This balloon-pricking and the Governor's well-known populist streak mingled well in his opening speech to the 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference of the Chianina Cattle Society. He drew parallels between the legal fraternity and the bovine subjects of the conference: "I had seen the Chianina parading in the ring at the Exhibition and I must say that I noticed the great dignity with which it carried itself — not unlike some members of my former profession".<sup>13</sup>

Sir Walter Campbell's stint as a World War Two flying instructor seemed slight preparation for the supersonic manoeuvring of an F-111, yet the Governor enthusiastically acted as navigator and then took the controls of the potent, state-of-the-art fighter aircraft during a visit to Amberley Air Force base in November 1985. "Once you learn, you never forget," was the Governor's jaunty throwaway as he emerged, clearly exhilarated, from the fighter's cockpit. Squadron Leader Geoff Shepherd confirmed that Campbell had indeed taken the controls of the plane at supersonic speed during the 90 minute flight which had taken them west to Toowoomba, over Somerset Dam and Double Island Point.<sup>14</sup> This sort of activity did much to cement the image of a people's governor — the "Sir Wally" syndrome — in a state which prided itself on a free and easy, egalitarian, frontier ethos while remaining fiercely loyal to its traditions.

The overwhelming view of the general populace was that, apart from a necessary veneer of protocol, their Governor was like them. He developed a self-deprecating sense of humour. During a round of golf at the picturesque Royal Queensland course, as part of a Red Cross charity event in April 1986, a green ant found its way into the Governor's trousers and tenaciously ascended to considerable heights before announcing its presence, just as Sir Walter was readying for a putt on the second. With a muttered imprecation, the Governor putted — then darted for the cover of nearby trees, removed his slacks, and shook furiously - duly locating and despatching the ant. Later, in the clubhouse, Sir Walter earned applause when he speculated on a conspiracy theory. His golfing opponents had resorted, he quipped, to "the ultimate in gamesmanship".<sup>15</sup>

Despite his bonhomie and avuncular demeanour, Sir Walter took a serious view of constitutional issues. Media reports soon began to provide inklings for the broader public that

---

<sup>13</sup> Campbell, Sir W. 1985. Speech to the 4th World Conference of the Chianina Cattle Society, 4th August 1985.

<sup>14</sup> 'The Gov off like a rocket', Daily Sun (Brisbane), 20 November 1985.

<sup>15</sup> Pat Lloyd, 'The ultimate in gamesmanship', Top Shot Column, Telegraph (Brisbane), 29 April 1986.

Campbell would not be a mere cipher in the affairs of state. Peter Morley in the *Brisbane Courier Mail* suggested that the Governor was “apparently ... not prepared to rubber stamp Government decisions”.<sup>16</sup> Campbell obtained an agreement from the Premier and Cabinet that he would be provided with background information on people being appointed to statutory boards and authorities, and the reasons for the vacancies.<sup>17</sup>

At a civic reception in Mount Isa, Sir Walter paraphrased the Bagehot doctrine — “to advise, caution and encourage” — making it clear that he had “the opportunity to express views on decisions made by the State Government” and stating further, “I have done just that, and will continue to do so”.<sup>18</sup> Campbell knew his constitutional role and knew the limits of the law. He often referred to the rule of law and the separation of powers and articulated their importance in a robust democracy. His responsibilities as part of the law making edifice were to be taken seriously.

Campbell shed more light on the Executive Council issue almost two years later. In an address to the 1988 Endowed Lecture before the Royal Australian Institute of Public Administration (Queensland Division), he cited Bagehot’s famous work *The English Constitution*: the Governor, in the exercise of his constitutional powers and responsibilities, possesses the Monarch’s “celebrated rights ... to be consulted, to encourage and to warn”, in respect of ministerial advice given to him. As Bagehot suggested, a Governor, the monarch’s representative, can, like the monarch, “use these rights with singular effect”.<sup>19</sup>

He (the King or, by extension, the Governor) would say to his minister: “The responsibility of these measures is upon you. Whatever you think best must be done. Whatever you think best shall have my full and effectual support. But you will observe that for this reason and that reason what you propose to do is bad; for this reason and that reason what you do not propose is better. I do not oppose, it is my duty not to oppose; but observe that I warn”. Supposing the King to be right, and to have what kings often have, the gift of effectual expression, he could not help moving his minister. He might not always turn his course, but he would always trouble his mind.

The self-assured Campbell possessed the gift of “effectual expression”. Whether or not he troubled any ministerial minds in mid-1986 with his requests for more information, according to Peter Morley,<sup>20</sup> Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen consulted Cabinet and secured agreement to a decision that:

His Excellency the Governor be provided with background information in the form of memorandums to be enclosed with Executive Council minutes on the persons being

---

<sup>16</sup> Peter Morley, ‘Governor wants details of cabinet decisions’, *Courier Mail*, 5 June 1986.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Morley, ‘Governor wants details of cabinet decisions’, *Courier Mail*, 5 June 1986.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Governor has say: Opinions are given on state decisions’, *North-West Star*, 17 June 1986,

<sup>19</sup> Bagehot, W. 1955. *The English Constitution*, OUP, p.67 quoted in Campbell, Sir W. Address to the 1988 Endowed Lecture before the Royal Australian Institute of Public Administration (Queensland Division) delivered 22nd March 1988.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Morley, ‘Governor wants details of cabinet decisions’, *Courier Mail*, 5 June 1986.

appointed to vacant positions in statutory bodies and authorities and the reasons for such vacancies.

Morley also reported that Sir Joh had made light of the Governor's request, brushing aside the suggestion that it was connected with appointments of former politicians and public servants to high profile jobs.

It is just that when people are appointed on boards or something of that nature he naturally would like to know who they are. Sometimes there is no background. He just said that he would be interested and that it would be good to know who was being appointed.<sup>21</sup>

The 1988 Royal Australian Institute of Public Administration lecture gave Sir Walter the opportunity to explain a range of aspects of the Governor's role, and in particular, to state in detail his relationship with the Executive Council.

The Governor is not himself a member of the Executive Council although the Act provides (s.7) that the Governor shall attend and preside at all meetings of the Council ... In the 1925 Royal Instructions to the Governor (cl. vi), it was expressly stated that: "In the exercise of the powers and authorities vested in him the Governor shall be guided by the advice of the Executive Council, but if in any case he shall see sufficient cause to dissent from the opinion of the said Council he may act in the exercise of his said powers and authorities in opposition of the Council, reporting the matter to us without delay, with the reasons for his so acting.

Campbell takes a clear line in the address. The Governor does not oppose, but acts as a balancing force in the system, a check on government haste and excess. The Governor offers wise counsel, and may act as an honest broker standing aloof from the political struggle, but cannot be taken for granted in the process of government, and is always informed and involved.

Campbell, as lawyer and judge and Chief Justice, was unusually well-trained for his constitutional role, for knowing his role in the state. As the *Courier-Mail* noted in its editorial of 6 June 1986:

Quite clearly, whether the Governor involves himself, and the extent of his involvement, will depend greatly upon the background and training of the vice-regal representative of the time. Retired service officers, with a lifetime of taking orders from politicians and, often, a certain political naivety, might generally be expected to be less involved, certainly less interventionist, than a former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court with a well-developed appreciation of political history.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen 1986, quoted in Peter Morley, 'Governor wants details of cabinet decisions', *Courier Mail*, 5 June 1986.

<sup>22</sup> Editorial, 'The Governor wants details of cabinet decisions', *Courier Mail* (Brisbane), 6 June 1986.

Whether or not Walter Campbell as Governor was an “interventionist” in constitutional affairs, it is not disputed that he was an enthusiastic activist in the area of ceremonial duties. In August 1986, following the example of Buckingham Palace and Government House in Victoria, Sir Walter opened the Vice-Regal doors at Bardon to welcome some 1500 guests at two successive garden parties. Politicians from all sides, various professional luminaries and a representation of Queenslanders from country and city joined in tea-sipping and sandwich eating while the strains of bagpipes resounded through the sprawling grounds.

While billed as formal affairs, the garden parties provided further opportunities for Campbell to display what Joan Priest describes as his “strongly outgoing personality”<sup>23</sup> and cement his relationship with Queenslanders from wide-ranging backgrounds. The sophisticated but folksy mingling of tradition and laid-back, down-to-earth style was much in evidence at the Government House parties, where police on security duty mixed with guests and shared refreshments.<sup>24</sup>

### **The phantom crisis of 1986**

1986 was an election year. The National Party’s wafer-thin majority (achieved through two Liberal defections in 1983) fed speculation about a hung Parliament. The prospect of no party achieving an outright victory teased constitutional experts and media commentators, who named Sir Walter as a potential major player in sorting out any uncertainty ensuing from such a result. Fuelling all this was the apparently poisonous relationship between the two conservative parties, with public statements particularly from the National leadership questioning the possibility of working with the Liberals, who had walked out of the previous coalition. Sir Joh made it plain that he could not trust or work with the Liberals, while National Party President Sir Robert Sparkes publicly canvassed the option of attempting to continue as a minority Government, and Liberal Leader Sir William Knox compared National Party attitudes to those of dictatorial former Philippines President Marcos.<sup>25</sup>

A visit by the Campbells to Government House at Yarralumla, in the week prior to the election, heightened the sense of impending crisis. There was speculation that Sir Walter may have been conferring with Governor-General Sir Ninian Stephen on the constitutional options open to a State Governor in the event of a hung Parliament. David Smith, the Governor-General’s official secretary, hosed this down. He denied that any such consultation had taken place and said that the Campbells were merely accepting a long-standing invitation to reciprocate visits by Sir Ninian and Lady Stephen to Government House in Queensland.<sup>26</sup> Such a visit had taken place as recently as July, when Sir Ninian Stephen had invested Walter with the ancient Order of St John in a ceremony steeped in medieval tradition.<sup>27</sup> As Prior of the Order in Australia, Sir

---

<sup>23</sup> Priest, J. 1995. Sir Harry Gibbs: Without fear or favour. Scribblers Publishing: Mudgeeraba, Qld., at 26.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Vice-regal knees-up’, Daily Sun (Brisbane), 29 August 1986.

<sup>25</sup> John Stubbs, ‘Polls crisis ahead’, Sunday Sun (Brisbane), 21 September 1986.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Government House denies link’, Courier Mail, 31 October 1986.

<sup>27</sup> ‘St John order for Governor’, Courier Mail, 12 July 1986.



Ninian had also overseen the investiture of Lady Campbell as Commander Sister of the Order.

Allusions and comparisons by commentators to the Federal sphere were to be expected. Just over a decade earlier Governor-General Sir John Kerr had dismissed the Labor Government of Gough Whitlam to resolve a deadlock between the House of Representatives and the Senate over a supply bill. Sir John had installed Opposition Leader Malcolm Fraser as caretaker Prime Minister on the condition that he would proceed immediately to an election.

Much controversy erupted when it became known that, in reaching his decision, Kerr had not only taken advice from Prime Minister Whitlam, but had consulted Chief Justice and former Menzies Government Attorney-General, Sir Garfield Barwick. In the fallout from that momentous political dispute, the Bjelke-Petersen Government moved to shore up the Queensland Governor's power, enacting constitutional amendments which effectively increased Vice-Regal options to seek alternative advice from that of the Premier. The wording stated explicitly that the Governor "should not be subject to direction from any person whatsoever nor limited as to his sources of advice".<sup>28</sup>

With an unlimited range of potential advisors, to whom should Walter Campbell turn first? There was no failure of supply looming, but the opinion polls were indicating a likely failure of any party to secure an outright majority. Dr Chris Gilbert, lecturer in Constitutional Law at the University of Queensland, was asked by Ean Higgins of the *Australian Financial Review* about the Governor's options. Dr Gilbert suggested that if the Nationals emerged as the largest single party, as expected, a likely avenue for Sir Walter would be to accept Sir Joh's advice to be recommissioned as a minority government, given that the government had several months of supply. This would provide an opportunity for Sir Joh to test his strength on the floor of the House, though Sir Walter might well make a pre-condition that Parliament should be recalled quickly.<sup>29</sup>

According to Dr Gilbert, if the Nationals rejected coalition overtures from the Liberals, or a truculent Liberal Party would not guarantee support for National Party bills, Sir Walter could then consult with Liberal and/or Labor leaders to establish whether either of those parties could form a government by forming some sort of alliance. Alternatively, the Governor could commission Sir Joh to form a Fraser-style caretaker government, until the Australian Electoral Commission could organise a fresh election.

Associate Professor of Government at the University of Queensland, Dr Kenneth Wiltshire, suggested that Sir Walter might actually choose to do nothing, denying Sir Joh a commission until convinced that he could get a majority on the floor of the House. Alternatively, the Governor might act as "honest broker" between the warring conservative parties, calling both Sir Joh and Sir William Knox in for talks. Dr Wiltshire argued that Sir Walter would "play his

---

<sup>28</sup> Constitution Act of 1867 (Qld).

<sup>29</sup> Ean Higgins, 'Experts: The Governor would be impartial', *Australian Financial Review*, 29 October 1986.

role straight down the line in what amounts to one last legal case”.<sup>30</sup> Academic confidence in Campbell’s impartiality and constitutional propriety was quickly echoed by opposition political players. Peter Beattie, then the ALP’s State campaign director, thought that “Sir Walter could be relied upon to do precisely the right thing according to legal convention”.<sup>31</sup> Liberal Party State President John Moore stated that “Wally” would do nothing other “than act on a legal interpretation of events”.<sup>32</sup>

Media speculation on the Governor’s likely actions included a number of references to Campbell’s personal history. Damien Murphy in the *Age*, Peter Bowers in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and to a lesser extent Marion Smith in the *Sunday Mail*, cited the Campbell student days at UQ and his supposed radical tendencies.

More recent events were also cited as evidence that Walter Campbell was of independent mind and would not necessarily do the bidding of the conservative side of politics. Marion Smith noted that Sir Walter had “pointedly” conducted the Ministerial swearing-in ceremony of Yvonne Chapman at Government House, rather than at the Executive Building as had been customary under his predecessor.<sup>33</sup>

State Election day — 1 November 1986 — finally arrived, and even on that morning, the press were placing Sir Walter’s potential role firmly in the spotlight. Craig Herbert wrote in the *Brisbane Courier Mail*:

Although this man cannot vote today, his decision could equal the ballots of Queensland’s 1.5 million voters in the State election ... Sir Walter’s office has made it clear that if there is a hung Parliament, he would act with the benefit of sound Constitutional advice.<sup>34</sup>

Such advice was not required. Sir Walter, staying over on Queensland’s Sunshine Coast after opening the new Caloundra Library on Friday, was not summoned back to Government House. As election night drew on, and psephologists and opinion pollsters grew increasingly red-faced, Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen’s National Party claimed an outright victory.

### **Distinguished guests**

The feverish speculation and atmosphere of impending political crisis soon seemed miles away, as another juggernaut - this time led by the angular framework of a “Popemobile” — swept across the Brisbane landscape. 26 November 1986 saw the first visit by a serving Pontiff to the Queensland capital, and Sir Walter and Sir Joh, all possible contention apparently behind them,

---

<sup>30</sup> # Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Beattie quoted in Ean Higgins, ‘Experts: The Governor would be impartial’, *Australian Financial Review*, 29 October 1986.

<sup>32</sup> John Moore quoted in Ean Higgins, ‘Experts: The Governor would be impartial’, *Australian Financial Review*, 29 October 1986.

<sup>33</sup> Marion Smith, ‘Spotlight will shift to Sir Walter after election’, *Sunday Mail (Brisbane)*, 26 October 1986.

<sup>34</sup> Craig Herbert, ‘Sir Walter waits in the wings’, *Courier Mail (Brisbane)*, 1 November 1986.

were on the tarmac at Eagle Farm to welcome the distinguished guest. It was a blistering day. Neither the charismatic John Paul II or the jovial Queensland Governor showed any sign of wilting. Campbell escorted the Pope across the melting bitumen of the runway toward the waiting crowds and receptions. Invariably, Campbell's mix of affability and adherence to convention put visiting dignitaries and other famous personalities at their ease.

On 18 December, just a few weeks after the papal visit, the Campbells entertained two legendary stars of stage and screen, Rex Harrison and Claudette Colbert, to lunch at Government House.<sup>35</sup> The veteran acting duo, taking a break between performances of the play *Aren't We All?* at Brisbane's Lyric Theatre, enjoyed both the leafy surrounds of Bardon and the wide ranging topics of after-lunch conversation with the Vice-Regal couple.

Members of various royal houses were also on the Governor's guest list during the Campbell years. On the evening of 6 February 1987, a State Reception honouring Queen Margrethe of Denmark was held at the Hilton International Hotel in Brisbane. Meeting the Queen and her husband Prince Henrik officially were Sir Walter and Lady Campbell, Premier Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen and Senator Lady Flo Bjelke-Petersen.<sup>36</sup> It was a grand banquet, attended by many of the State's luminaries, including various representatives of politics, law and academe. After a speech by the Premier, Queen Margrethe proposed a formal toast to Queen Elizabeth II. The royal couple also met members of Brisbane's Danish community and toured the Queensland Art Gallery during their whirlwind tour.

### **1988: the Expo roadshow**

Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen's refusal to resign (treated in detail in an earlier article in this series) was undoubtedly the major event for the Queensland Governor in 1987. The following year, however, was also memorable, in ways both pleasant and odious. 200 years after Captain Arthur Phillip arrived in Botany Bay aboard the brig *Supply*, Sir Walter Campbell stood before a similarly impressive vista of billowing sails, as replicas of the first fleet's tall ships started down the Brisbane River to launch the 1988 Bicentennial celebrations. For Campbell, as for many Queenslanders, it was an uplifting start to the year, especially after the tense political in-fighting which had threatened to spill over into the constitutional arena during the last months of 1987.

Understandably, not all Australians had welcomed the Bicentennial. In December 1987, the noted poet Oodgeroo Noonuccal had relinquished her English name of Kath Walker and announced her intention to return her MBE to Walter Campbell, as a protest against celebrations "which symbolised 200 years of humiliation and brutality to the Aboriginal people".<sup>37</sup> Her articulate, dignified protest specifically excluded a boycott of Expo 88, which showcased Aboriginal art and culture. The Governor accepted the returned MBE with good grace, as the Queen and her representatives have done in similar circumstances elsewhere.

---

<sup>35</sup> 'Day by Day', Courier Mail (Brisbane), 18 December 1986.

<sup>36</sup> Sunday Mail (Brisbane), 8 February 1987.

<sup>37</sup> 'Poet changes name, returns MBE in Bicentennial protest', Courier Mail (Brisbane), 16 December 1987.

While maintaining political impartiality and savouring the relative harmony of the Bicentennial, Sir Walter was nonetheless prepared to raise certain issues which he saw as important matters for public debate. In Brisbane on 25 January, he addressed more than 80 delegates to a conference of Supreme and Federal Court judges, where he warned against US-style political involvement in the judicial selection process. In a reference to Judge Robert Bork — a Presidential nominee for the United States Supreme Court who had been rejected after 12 days of Senate hearings — Campbell suggested that judges should be extremely careful in their public statements. He also advised them not to “individually rush in to defend themselves from the media or the public”. The defence of judges, the Governor made clear, “is a task assumed by the Attorney-General of the day, and the latter should be made fully aware of this as being one of his duties”.

Disagreeing with claims that Australian judges were ivory tower dwellers remote from the concerns of the average person, Campbell praised them as “persons who possess a great deal of worldly wisdom”. He did, however, make the point that, to avoid controversy, judges were obliged to accept a more secluded life. His closing remarks traversed the criteria for judicial selection:

The appointment of judges generally has been, and certainly it ought always to be, a very careful exercise. It is the Government of the day which appoints judges and it should be made clear to it at all times that judges should be appointed because of their legal professionalism, their sound character and their firm sense of independence. Certainly politics should not be introduced into the appointment of judges.

### **Buckingham Palace and the bush — the Queen’s Expo visit**

The Queen and her Vice-Regal representative were given warm and rousing receptions at two grand opening events in 1988 — the Stockman’s Hall of Fame at the outback town of Longreach, and the official launch of the World Expo on the South Bank of the Brisbane River.

The Campbells arrived in Longreach at 1.30pm on Friday 29 April. A tent city, dubbed the “Court Pot Camp” by local wags, had been erected on the town’s eastern outskirts, and on the previous evening 1500 guests had enjoyed a formal dinner in a huge marquee beside the newly completed Hall of Fame. The town’s population had swelled five-fold, to almost 20,000. The \$13 million Stockman’s Hall project had been conceived by bushman and artist Hugh Sawrey and designed by Dutch-born Australian Feiko Boumann to celebrate the rich history and spirit of the outback. At 2pm the Campbells welcomed the Queen and Prince Philip, who had just flown in from Melbourne, though in the way of such events, there was little time for airport chat. In company with Prime Minister Bob Hawke, Premier Ahern, and US Ambassador Bill Lane, the royal party proceeded quickly to the Hall of Fame, a dramatic structure of billowing roof sections and cathedral-like glass panels that some observers were already billing as the Opera House of the outback.

The next day found both the Queen and her Vice-Regal representative back in Brisbane for the opening of Expo. The Queen was heckled at a Brisbane church service by protestors for Aboriginal land rights. On Sunday 1 May, the Campbells farewelled the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh before the royal yacht the *Brittania* steamed for Sydney. Each member of the boarding party was presented with a silver letter knife, gold pen or other personal reminder of the occasion. While part of normal state protocol, the gifts marked a successful trip. The mood was captured in a letter from the Queen's deputy private secretary, Sir Robert Fellowes, written that afternoon at sea. Thanking the Campbells for "a delicious lunch", Sir Robert wrote:

The Queen's stay in Queensland, short though it was, seemed to me to be as successful as one could possibly have forecast, and you must have been delighted, as Governor, that the State should have brought off such a triumph after the events of the last twelve months.

The next day, the Queen's private secretary, Sir William Heseltine, wrote again from the *Brittania, en passage* to Sydney. He thanked Sir Walter and Lady Campbell for their hospitality and extended the gratitude of the Queen and Prince Philip "for coming all the way to Longreach to meet them". Heseltine went on:

It looks as if the political life of Queensland will continue to be an interesting one. You must have gained great confidence from having dealt so successfully with last year's constitutional crisis — if that is not too strong a word. On all sides, I hear tributes to the wisdom and skill which you showed during those troublesome times. It has been a matter of satisfaction to me that your visit to London and this subsequent visit to Queensland have given us such a good chance to get to know one another well...

The Queen never stayed overnight at Government House during the Campbells' tenure, though the Duke was a frequent and welcome guest.<sup>38</sup> His bluff, no-nonsense style, and sense of devilment, quickly put his hosts at ease. Lady Campbell recalls: "I remember once when he came out here to address the Flying Doctor Service — he was the guest speaker, and when we came home that night, it wasn't very late, but he wasn't well at all — bad flu or something like that. But we asked him would he like to go to bed straight away. He said no, and he sat up and talked to us until midnight".<sup>39</sup>

### **The good, the bad, and the ruthless**

Other guests had left a somewhat different impression on the occupants of Government House. Romanian leader Nicolai Ceausescu and his wife Elena came to Queensland in April 1988 to sign a coal deal between their country's trade corporation and mining magnate Lang Hancock. They arrived with an enormous entourage and, in Sir Walter's words: "left in their wake an impression of overriding arrogance, paranoia, and a complete disregard for our convenience and for our usual household arrangements and practices".<sup>40</sup> The Ceausescus were accompanied

---

<sup>38</sup> JF Corkery, Interview with Sir Walter and Lady Campbell (Brisbane, 1999).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Sir Walter Campbell, Queensland Club Breakfast (Speech delivered to Queensland Club, 18 April 1996).

even into the innermost rooms of Government House by a squad of four bodyguards —burly men, carrying draped topcoats concealing Uzi machine pistols — but even before they arrived, the demands of the Presidential couple had created turmoil.

A Romanian advance party removed all Government House linen from the guest beds, covered mattresses in plastic and remade the beds with their own supplies. Coathangers, soaps and towels were removed; old style telephones with direct lines to Romania were installed in the bedrooms allocated to the couple, screens were erected to divide the Campbell living area from the guest wing, locks were affixed to any conceivable entry points, both real and imaginary. In preparation for a stay of just two nights, technicians descended on the Government House Administration building to install more telephone lines, an antique switchboard and an outmoded telex machine. Meanwhile, back in the guest wing, light switches, doorknobs and other surfaces were wiped with an antiseptic solution.

After a welcome by Premier Ahern at Brisbane airport, the President travelled with Sir Walter, his Aide-de-Camp, and an interpreter to Government House while Madame Ceausescu and her interpreter accompanied Lady Campbell in another vehicle. Attempts by the Campbells to make conversation and point out places of interest received little or no response. A total of 16 cars and two buses quickly followed the President to Government House, where the staff were expecting a total of 10 guests. Half the Romanian cabinet, including the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, entered the house and pushed past restraints to occupy the drawing room. Eventually Government House staff were able to herd some of the party down to the parking area, where they “milled about — something which they were to do through much of the time of the Ceausescus’ visit”, as Campbell put it.

The following day, the President made it known that he and his wife wanted to take over both Sir Walter’s and Lady Campbell’s studies, which were situated in the main part of the house. The Campbells refused. They arranged instead for Ceausescu to receive callers in the Investiture Room on the house’s lower level. The desire to control the agenda did not stop there: on a visit to Lone Pine Sanctuary, a popular Brisbane nature reserve, the Presidential party requested that all other visitors should be asked to leave. That request was also denied, but later that same afternoon, Madame Ceausescu showed she was not easily rebuffed. A message was sent to the Official Secretary at Government House, conveying her wish to visit a department store. When told that the shops were already closed, she persisted until the Official Secretary rang the manager of the Myer Centre, who arranged for part of the centre to remain open. A police escort was quickly despatched to Government House, and a line-up of at least six cars, containing plain clothes officers, Romanian security staff and a research officer, duly assembled in the driveway. After some time, Madame Ceausescu appeared at the top of the stairs and casually told her staff that she would now rather take a walk in the garden.

Dinner that evening was difficult. Romanian staff made it known that the Presidential couple wanted the drawing room seats usually occupied by the Campbells. The Campbells simply directed them to other seats and sat in their usual places. The Ceausescus greeted the other

guests in the normal way, but no sooner had they been seated for dinner than a cloth with a strong antiseptic solution was brought to the President, apparently to guard against infection through handshakes.

Ceausescu would also not eat any food prepared by the Government House chef. Separate meals prepared by his own cook were delivered to the table. His wife was apparently willing to risk life and limb and ate the Government House food, but only after the valet had tasted it. The President also requested that the air-conditioning be turned off, citing a concern about gases being introduced to the room. An invitation to coffee and liqueurs in the drawing room was declined and it was with relief that the Vice-Regal hosts and other guests finally watched the Romanian party retire upstairs. So, too, when the Campbells saw them off at the airport the next day.

Sir Walter spoke at the Queensland Club Breakfast of 18 April 1996 about the Ceausescus's demise at the hands of their own citizens – they were summarily tried and executed on Christmas Day 1989 for genocide and other crimes: “While we might have judged them sternly, the Romanian people delivered the ultimate judgment”.

Memorable also was a Government House luncheon held during Expo for the Crown Prince of Thailand. The guest of honour proved personally charming but caused amazement amongst Australian onlookers when he suddenly snapped his fingers – a cue for a member of the Thai Royal staff to fall to the floor, traverse the room on bended knees, deliver the Prince's pipe, and then retreat in similar fashion.

The Campbells hosted visits by the monarchs of both Belgium and Spain, though the circumstances surrounding each were quite different. The Belgian King and Queen arrived at a politically-tense moment, stepping off their plane into the sweltering Brisbane atmosphere on the Friday before Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen resigned. By contrast, the pervading mood upon the arrival of Spain's King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia was one of light-heartedness and celebration. Expo was in full swing, and what had seemed to Queenslanders like a dramatic political crisis was now a fading memory.

The 1987 Premiership fiasco would probably have meant little to this Royal couple who, a decade earlier, had taken prominent roles in the restoration of Spanish democracy following the death of the dictator General Franco. While they did not stay at Government House, this stylish and exotic duo left an indelible impression on the Campbells, who described them, with typical understatement, as “very nice people”.<sup>41</sup>

Another charming visitor during Expo was Francesco Cossiga, then President of Italy. Born in Sassari, Sardinia, Cossiga had enjoyed an interesting and varied career in and around politics and the law. Before becoming Head of State in 1985, he was a *Democrazia Christiani* Member of

---

<sup>41</sup> JF Corkery, Interview with Sir Walter and Lady Campbell (Brisbane, 1999).

Parliament, holding several Cabinet positions. As Minister for Internal Affairs, he restructured the police, civil protection, and secret service, resigning after the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro in 1978.

Campbell first met Cossiga when visiting Rome on a Remuneration Tribunal study tour, the object being to question the Italian Minister on his country's methods of fixing Parliamentary salaries. Cossiga took the Campbell party to lunch at a military club where, through an interpreter, the Queenslander paid tribute to the exquisite décor. "You are very lucky here in Italy to have military clubs like this," Campbell said, "wonderfully furnished. The works of art are so good."<sup>42</sup> "Oh yes," Cossiga replied. "But you are very lucky in that you did not have the Barbarini".<sup>43</sup>

On his Presidential visit to Brisbane, Cossiga dined at Government House, where he repaid Campbell's compliments. Cultured and generous-natured, the President told Georgina Campbell how "lovely" the room was and mused on his "retirement" plans, which included lecturing at a university.<sup>44</sup> In recent years, the latter wish has been fulfilled, with Cossiga returning to his native Sardinia as Professor of Law at Sassari University.

The Campbells' love of Italy, of art and learning, and their close connection with law and politics, clearly struck a special chord with their guest on this occasion, but their contribution as ambassadors for Queensland during Expo was broad-ranging, transcending boundaries of nation, culture and social situation. In those heady days of 1988, the Vice-Regal couple were very much the public face of their State. Their balance of warmth, sophistication, discretion and easy-going affability made them attractive diplomats, communicating as easily with visiting dignitaries as with ordinary, egalitarian-natured Queenslanders. From the tweed-jacketed Picnic Races at Dalby to Queensland Day black-tie celebrations with John Denver, Donny Osmond and the Duke and Duchess of Kent, Walter and Georgina Campbell maintained a hectic yet harmonious schedule.

### **The politics of corruption**

The Bicentennial year may have begun with tall-masted ships moving regally down the placid waters of the Brisbane River. But it was not all smooth sailing. Behind the ceremonial occasions, the Expo celebrations, the regional visits and the Government House luncheons, the political cauldron simmered on, with occasional boilovers from sources such as the Fitzgerald Inquiry into Police Corruption. In November, Sir Walter received a letter from Sir William Heseltine, the Queen's private secretary:

Dear Governor,

The Premier's submission in respect of Graeme Robert Joseph Parker has been laid before

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> JF Corkery, Interview with Sir Walter and Lady Campbell (Brisbane, 1999).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.



the Queen. Her Majesty approves the Premier's recommendation that the Queen's Police Medal awarded to Mr Parker in 1986 should be cancelled and annulled.

Graeme Parker had risen quickly to the rank of Assistant Commissioner of Police. Described at the time of receiving his award as a "meticulous investigator" and a man of "high integrity", he had been awarded the QPM (Queen's Police Medal) in 1986 for "distinguished police service". In 1987, Parker had admitted taking over \$130,000 in bribes for protecting illegal prostitution and gambling operations, having been granted a conditional amnesty in exchange for information about police corruption.<sup>45</sup>

In a crackdown on those proven by the inquiry to have acted improperly, Premier Ahern had instigated the request to Buckingham Palace that Parker be stripped of his award. Now Sir Walter had received confirmation of the award annulment, but the Premier's problems did not stop there. Former Minister Don Lane — who with Brian Austin had defected from the Liberals to give Joh Bjelke-Petersen's National Party an outright majority in 1983 — had given evidence to the Fitzgerald Inquiry which suggested widespread misuse of Ministerial expenses. This prompted Opposition Leader Wayne Goss to visit Government House, where he complained to Sir Walter about the Government's persistent refusal to open its Ministerial accounts to public scrutiny. Goss argued that this was damaging public confidence in the institution of Parliament. Accused by Ahern of "circus acts and tawdry political stunts" and trying "to drag the high office of Governor into the Fitzgerald inquiry melee", the Labor leader vigorously defended his right to see the Governor "who was constitutionally entitled to consult widely in the interest of good government".<sup>46</sup> Goss said that he did not go to Government House "with the purpose of seeking the dismissal of the Government or Ministers. I did not ask the Governor to take any action".<sup>47</sup>

### **The 1987 crisis goes public**

On 16 December 1988, with permission from Government House, Premier Mike Ahern took the unprecedented step of publicly releasing documents exchanged between various parties involved in the November 1987 constitutional crisis. Included was correspondence between himself and the Governor, between the Governor and the former Premier, as well as legal opinions provided to Attorney-General Clauson from the Solicitor-General and solicitors Cleary and Hoare. Readers of the daily press could now read Sir Walter Campbell's Vice-Regal advice to Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, when the former Premier proposed that his entire cabinet should fall: "...I advise you that, should you resign as Premier, it may be that I may not re-commission you as Premier unless I was of the view that you were able to form a new ministry and that you would be able to obtain the confidence and support of the Parliament".<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Queen strips corrupt policeman of his medal', *The Australian* (Sydney), 14 November 1988; Peter Hansen and John Wright, 'Queen strips top cop of honor', *The Courier Mail* (Brisbane) 13 November 1988.

<sup>46</sup> Peter Morley, 'Goss sees Governor over expenses rorts', *The Courier Mail* (Brisbane), 18 November 1988.

<sup>47</sup> Peter Morley, 'Goss sees Governor over expenses rorts', *The Courier Mail* (Brisbane), 18 November 1988.

<sup>48</sup> Letter from Sir Walter Campbell to Sir Johannes Bjelke-Petersen, 25 November 1987, quoted by Peter Morley,

Justifying his release of the correspondence as in the historical interest, so that researchers could “get it right”, Ahern praised Campbell’s handling of the crisis. The documents would, the Premier suggested, “disclose that the office of Governor in this State was carried out to the highest standard of behaviour in the circumstances”.<sup>49</sup> The documents also showed, in Ahern’s view, “that the office of Governor is an important office in the State and completely indispensable from time to time”.<sup>50</sup>

Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen had a different perspective, suggesting that the release was damaging to Ahern, his Government, and the Governor. “The Premier has demonstrated his amazing ability to get himself and others into trouble,” Sir Joh said, hinting that a Pandora’s Box had been opened and, “it leaves it open for me to take this matter further”.<sup>51</sup> Claiming that a false impression had been given through the selective release of documents, that the Government had “left out far more than what they put in”, Bjelke-Petersen argued that the events leading up to his resignation needed to be seen in context.<sup>52</sup> In his view, there was much more to the issue, involving State Conference and Central Council decisions of the National Party, and the Government was “running scared” and anxious “to get their side of the story out”.<sup>53</sup>

While the former Premier spoke of forthcoming revelations which would trouble the Ahern Government, there were echoes in the press of the previous year’s Christmas good cheer for Walter Campbell. *The Australian* newspaper was fulsome in its praise, both of the office of State Governor and of the current Vice-Regal representative in Queensland. Congratulating Mike Ahern on his decision to release the correspondence, *The Australian* editorial of 20 December 1988 then went on:

The story told through the documents reflects great credit on Sir Walter. He handled an extremely difficult situation with great good sense and firmness... This episode discloses a governor acutely alive to the need for a premier to maintain the confidence of the Parliament. It is an outstanding example of a governor using the legitimate discretionary power of his position to protect the democratic principle that a government must enjoy the confidence of Parliament.

It is encouraging to learn about the efficient operation of the checks and balances within our system. Sir Walter’s actions in this matter add valuably to the historical precedent concerning State governors and their premiers. The importance of the State governors is

---

‘Letters show ‘amazing’ about-turns in Sir Joh’s bid to destroy foes’, *The Courier Mail* (Brisbane), 17 December 1988; Letter from Sir Walter Campbell to Sir Johannes Bjelke-Petersen, 25 November 1987, quoted by Richard Owen, ‘Ahern releases Joh letters in “interests of history”’, *The Australian* (Sydney), 17-18 December 1988.

<sup>49</sup> # Richard Owen, ‘Ahern releases Joh letters in “interests of history”’, *The Australian* (Sydney), 17-18 December 1988.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Jeremy Scott, ‘Premier leaves the door open for action: Sir Joh’, *The Sunday Mail* (Brisbane), 18 December 1988.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Owen, ‘Joh worries about his place in history’, *The Australian* (Sydney), 20 December 1988.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

too often overlooked in Australian politics. Sir Walter has demonstrated how valuable the office is in a crisis.

### **More awards for Walter Campbell**

With the inception of an Australian honours system by the Whitlam Government in the 1970s, the custom arose for newspapers across the country to announce recipients of the various awards on 26 January, Australia Day, which commemorates the establishment of the first European settlement at Port Jackson, Sydney, in 1788.

On the 1989 Australia Day long weekend, Sir Walter Campbell was awarded an AC for service to the Crown and the people of Queensland. He had been knighted 10 years earlier, had two Honorary Doctorates, was a Queen's Counsel and a Freeman of the City of London. Now his contribution to public service — to his home state and to the system and traditions which he had long upheld — was being recognised in a distinctly Australian manner. On 10 February, after a civic luncheon hosted by Brisbane Lord Mayor Sallyanne Atkinson, the outgoing Governor-General, Sir Ninian Stephen, invested Campbell with the insignia of his appointment as a Companion in the General Division of the Order of Australia. Campbell had not been an advocate of the new system in the early years. Recognition within it now gave him immense pride.

### **A different type of dismissal**

On 8 June 1989, it fell to Walter Campbell to formalise the nation's first dismissal of a Supreme Court Judge. The affairs of Mr Justice Vasta had been scrutinized by a three-man Parliamentary Judges Commission, headed by Sir Harry Gibbs, which had found several grounds for Vasta's dismissal. Among the charges against Vasta were that he had made and maintained allegations of a conspiracy against him by corruption chief Tony Fitzgerald, Attorney-General Paul Clauson and Chief Justice Sir Dormer Andrews; that he had given false evidence in a defamation case; and that he had attempted to deceive taxation authorities over the value of equipment at Cosco Holdings, a family-owned toilet paper manufacturing company.

Vasta subsequently addressed the bar of Parliament for over 2 hours, maintaining that he had never been guilty of any wrong-doing and describing the inquiry as "scandalous".<sup>54</sup> Despite his spirited defence, Parliament voted at 3am to remove the judge. A motion for Vasta's dismissal, moved by Premier Ahern, was passed with only a few dissenting voices. Sir Walter signed the legislation ending the career of his former colleague some 12 hours later.

### ***On the separation of powers***

On Friday 22 September 1989, a challenge by Russell Cooper against Premier Mike Ahern was

---

<sup>54</sup> David Smith and Mark Voisey, 'Vasta's parting shot', *The Sun* (Brisbane), 8 June 1989.

After his dismissal, Justice Vasta returned to practice at the Queensland Bar and has quite often appeared for disadvantaged litigants.

successful, and the latter took the drive to Government House to tender his resignation. Soon afterwards, Sir Walter swore in the new Premier, who ran into an early controversy when he appeared unable to explain the doctrine of the separation of powers during an interview with ABC journalist Quentin Dempster. It was a question which had also baffled Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen under cross-examination during the Fitzgerald Royal Commission.

Russell Cooper accused the ABC of anti-National Party bias, an argument backed by commentators such as Padriac McGuinness<sup>55</sup> and Richard Farmer,<sup>56</sup> who suggested in *The Australian* newspaper that Montesquieu's famous doctrine is not, and never has been, an inherent feature of the Westminster system, as practised either in Britain or Australia. This was also the view of Attorney-General Clauson, who on 29 September vigorously defended the Premier, arguing that the Cabinet, or Executive arm of government, was drawn from the Parliamentary, or Legislative arm, resulting in the two arms becoming entwined. Through no doing of Walter Campbell, Government House also became embroiled in the debate.

Journalist Neil Doorley, reporting Paul Clauson's views for *The Sun* newspaper of 29 September, wrote: "A spokesman for Governor Sir Walter Campbell today described the separation of powers as 'the absolute cornerstone of the Westminster system'."<sup>57</sup> Murray Massey, in the *Financial Review* of 2 October, repeated the claim.<sup>58</sup> The Official Secretary at Government House, Lieutenant-Colonel GA Nolan, responded in the letters columns of several papers with a vigorous denial that he had made any such statement on behalf of the Governor, or that he had volunteered his own opinion:

The facts of the matter are as follows. At about 9am on Friday September 29, I took a telephone call from a Mr Miles Kemp who said he was from *The Sun* newspaper. He sought to speak with the Governor but I said that the Governor was not available. In response to my asking him what he wanted to talk about, Mr Kemp said he wanted to know more about the separation of powers. During that brief conversation I said that I was aware of recent publicity that the separation of powers was the cornerstone of the Westminster system. However, I told Mr Kemp I could not help him in the matter.

I was not acting as spokesman for the Governor, nor was there any suggestion to that effect. Indeed, the Governor had no knowledge of my telephone conversation with Mr Kemp until after he read the article in *The Sun* newspaper later that day and spoke to me about it.<sup>59 60</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Padriac McGuinness, 'Doctrine of separation of powers - don't you worry about that', *The Australian* (Sydney), 3 October 1989.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Farmer, 'Separation of powers - it's no such thing', *The Australian* (Sydney), 4 October 1989.

<sup>57</sup> Neil Doorley, 'Clauson uproar - "Westminster irrelevant to Queensland"', *The Sun* (Brisbane), 29 September 1989.

<sup>58</sup> Murray Massey, 'Governor joins Queensland reforms row', *Financial Review* (Sydney), 2 October 1989.

<sup>59</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel G.A. Nolan, Letter to the Editor, *The Sun* (Brisbane), 4 October 1989.

<sup>60</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel G.A. Nolan, Letter to the Editor, *The Courier Mail* (Brisbane), 4 October 1989.

Mr Kemp held to his view of the conversation. ABC journalist Anna Reynolds also raised the matter of *The Sun* article with Lieutenant-Colonel Nolan at a Government House garden party on 29 September, a conversation which again resulted in differing interpretations of whether the Official Secretary was providing some insight into the Governor's views on the doctrine of the separation of powers. Nolan put his side forcefully in a letter to the *Financial Review* of 5 October:

I had not discussed the subject matter with the Governor at that stage, nor had I sought his "view", nor did I have any authority, or reason, to make any comments on the Governor's behalf.

I also make it clear that it is not within my authority, nor is it my practice, to express a view on matters of this nature at any time.<sup>61</sup>

Still at the garden party, Anna Reynolds then approached Sir Walter on camera and asked him to comment directly on the issue, a request which the Governor politely and properly declined. The incident drew the ire of the Attorney-General, who accused journalists of attacking Vice-Regal political independence, by using the well-known "walk-in" technique "usually reserved for the pursuit of crooks and shonky salesmen".<sup>62</sup>

At the election of Saturday 2 December 1989, the baton changed cleanly, with Russell Cooper conceding defeat at 9.37 pm and Labor's Wayne Goss claiming victory 20 minutes later. On the following Thursday, the Governor swore in Queensland's first Labor administration in 32 years.

### **Walter Campbell's extended term**

The conventional term for a State Governor or Commonwealth Governor-General is five years. This may be extended by mutual agreement between the Government, the Vice-Regal office holder and the Queen. In February 1990, following discussions between Wayne Goss and Sir Walter Campbell, the Premier's Department advised Buckingham Palace that the Governor was prepared to stay on for another two years. The extension of Campbell's term till 1992, confirmed by the Palace in March, was a popular decision.

Premier Goss felt that Campbell had "discharged his duties with distinction and competence".<sup>63</sup> There was strong cross-party support and undoubted affection in the community for their roving, affable Governor. After the political turmoil of the past few years, and now with an activist Government bent on a program of potentially contentious reforms, the image of stability and continuity offered by Campbell looked like a safe anchor for all sides.

---

<sup>61</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel G.A. Nolan, Letter to the Editor, *Financial Review* (Sydney), 5 October 1989.

<sup>62</sup> Murray Massey, 'Clouston attacks media on treatment of Qld Governor', *Financial Review* (Sydney), 5 October 1989.

<sup>63</sup> Peter Morley, 'Governor to stay on two more years', *Courier Mail* (Brisbane), 24 February 1990.

## **The top job – Campbell at Yarralumla**

One chapter in Campbell's illustrious career which has received remarkably little attention began quietly in Canberra on 1 May 1991. For some 23 days, the Queensland Governor, as Australia's most senior Vice-Regal representative, occupied the residence and fulfilled the functions of Governor-General Bill Hayden, who was absent on an official overseas tour. In the arcane nomenclature of Vice-Regal protocol, Campbell became Administrator of Australia rather than Acting Governor-General. All the potentially onerous responsibilities of the position were suddenly his, along with the location and trappings.

Sir Walter and Lady Campbell were officially welcomed to Canberra by fellow Queenslander Ben Humphreys, then Veteran Affairs Minister in the Hawke Labor Government, and were soon being whisked down the famed leafy avenue to the gates of Yarralumla, their home for the next few weeks. A change it may have been, but no holiday. The Hawke administration had decided to award an honorary Order of Australia to Turkish President Turgut Ozal, in recognition of the President's contribution to the development of bi-lateral relations between Australia and Turkey; efforts which had culminated in the previous year's successful commemoration of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Gallipoli landing. The award outraged members of the Greek, Cypriot, Armenian, and Kurdish communities in Australia, who organised protests against continued Turkish occupation of Cyprus and attempted to highlight alleged atrocities committed against ethnic minorities within Turkey.

Chanting, placard-waving demonstrators gathered outside Government House while, inside, Campbell bestowed one of the nation's highest honours on the Turkish leader. Prime Minister Hawke, in justifying the Government's decision, said Australia had always upheld the territorial integrity of Cyprus in the UN and other forums, and vowed to raise the issue with Ozal during their talks. It was left to Campbell to present the award with due ceremony, and he did that with his customary aplomb and good humour.

The second controversy to arise during Campbell's brief tenure at Yarralumla arose from the so-called "WA Inc" Royal Commission, where damaging revelations about the activities of former Western Australia Premier Brian Burke provoked the latter's resignation as Australian Ambassador to Northern Ireland and the Holy See. Dennis Rose, Chief General Counsel in the Commonwealth Attorney-General's department, tendered advice to the Federal government that Burke did not have a unilateral right to simply resign from employment held at the "pleasure" of the Crown, and suggested that the Governor-General or Administrator must act to formally terminate his appointment. On 9 May, Campbell presided over a meeting of Executive Council and, on the advice of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, formally terminated Burke's employment.

Controversy continued to rage for several days as to whether Burke — who had continued to engage in Labor Party fund-raising while serving as an Ambassador — was "sacked", "dismissed", or whether he had indeed "resigned" and his resignation required Vice-Regal action to take effect. For his part, Sir Walter followed the advice of the Executive. The then-

Federal Opposition made much of the fact that Burke received a higher payout than that which had originally been touted. In the long run, these were political considerations. There were no over-riding constitutional issues to be resolved. Campbell simply followed the conventions with absolute propriety.

In July 1991, it was Queensland's turn for stand-in Vice-Regal representation, with Sir Walter and Lady Campbell off on an official visit to the United Kingdom. First to occupy the role of administrator was Justice J. M. Macrossan, followed by Justice B. H. McPherson. Campbell used his overseas visit to market Queensland to the full. In an address to a business luncheon at the Queensland Government Office in London — attended by directors of companies such as RTZ, Tate and Lyle, Morgan Grenfell, as well as Foreign Office, Department of Trade and Chamber of Commerce figures — the Governor extolled the State's physical attractions, abundant resources, investment opportunities, economic strength and political stability. While conceding that his term in office had been more "politically eventful" than that of other 20<sup>th</sup> century Governors, he described the events as "a mere storm in a teacup" when seen "in the broad perspective of the nation's political history, and in economic terms".<sup>64</sup>

Governments in Queensland, whatever their party political make-up, are in favour of development, and seek to encourage investment and joint ventures between local companies and off-shore investors, wherever possible. ... The importance of economic matters to the Government of the State is reflected in the fact that the Premier encompasses economic and trade development within his portfolio.<sup>65</sup>

On 10 July, the Campbells were received by the Queen. Both their earlier audiences at the Palace had been in one of the rooms reserved for visitors. On this occasion, they were asked up to Her Majesty's private quarters. That morning the *Times* had carried an obituary for Russ Hinze, the ebullient "Minister for Everything" in Sir Joh's National Party Government. In opening the conversation, the Queen mentioned the obituary, and the Campbells noted a sparkle in the eyes suggesting she appreciated the complex nature of the man — his capacity for rough and tumble and for extreme generosity. "There were no other comments," Sir Walter said in a 1999 interview. "She never commented".<sup>66</sup> Lady Campbell added, "She would have understood, you know, this obituary gave his good points and all his warts."<sup>67</sup>

### **Countdown to retirement**

With Campbell's return to Queensland, attention began to focus on the fact that he had entered the final year of his extended term, and speculation was beginning about his potential successor as Governor. None of that seemed to be concerning Sir Walter, who kept up his normal schedule.

---

<sup>64</sup> Sir Walter Campbell, Address to Business Luncheon, Queensland Government Office, London, 9 July 1991.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> JF Corkery, Interview with Sir Walter and Lady Campbell (Brisbane, 1999).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

Then, in early September 1991, came a bombshell — the Premier announced that the Governor had been picked up by ambulance at 12.30 am and admitted to the Mater Hospital, where he was undergoing tests. The acting Chief Justice, Mr Justice McPherson, was appointed Deputy Governor when it was revealed that Sir Walter had suffered a stroke.

Peter Short QC, a Past President of the Law Society of Australia, who was mentored in the early stages of his career by Campbell and remained a family friend, recalls that Campbell spent hours before a mirror, reciting poetry in a determined effort to regain his full faculties of speech.<sup>68</sup> In a 2006 interview, veteran Brisbane solicitor Brian Halligan, a student of Campbell's at the University of Queensland in 1947 and a lifelong friend, praised "Wally's guts and stamina to recover from that stroke".<sup>69</sup> By December, the Governor was back in business, presenting Royal Humane Society bravery awards to nine deserving recipients and swearing in new Ministers in the Goss Cabinet.

### **Bowing out**

With the announcement in May 1992 that Leneen Forde, AC — a partner in the high profile law firm Sly Cannan & Peterson — would be Queensland's next Governor, the goodbyes began rolling in for Sir Walter Campbell. A *Sunday Mail* editorial on 19 July 1992 offered a tribute. Under the heading "Well done, Sir Walter", the paper described Campbell as "the quintessential governor", who had brought to the job "qualities of compassion and humor that have endeared him to Queenslanders".<sup>70</sup>

He has proved a focal point with whom Queenslanders could identify, displaying human qualities to comfort ordinary people in a world when times have often been stark, confusing and threatening. He has proved a model of dignity, untouched by snobbishness. He has been the Queen's representative, but to thousands of Queenslanders he has been Sir Wally...

His appointment by the party of the Right and its extension by the party of the Left showed how well his impartiality and integrity were regarded. He can retire with dignity, knowing he has served Queensland, and Queenslanders, with honor and distinction.<sup>71</sup>

In an interview with John Hay in the same newspaper, Sir Walter reaffirmed the values and principles which had guided him during his term of office. While admitting he sometimes would rather have been fishing or playing golf, he suggested that enthusiasm was a quality "that can and should be infectious to people ... there are no five-day weeks for Governors".<sup>72</sup> He was adamant that "a Governor should not comment on controversial things when he is in

---

<sup>68</sup> G.A. Barlow, Interview with Peter Short, Q.C. (Brisbane, July 2005).

<sup>69</sup> G.A. Barlow, Interview with Brian Halligan (Brisbane, 20 March 2006).

<sup>70</sup> 'Well done, Sir Walter', *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane), 19 July 1992.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> John Hay, 'It's been a pleasure, Guv', *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane), 19 July 1992.



office ... He is above politics. He should be a focal figure for the people of the State, divorced from politics. A figure people can look to and see something permanent in a changing world".<sup>73</sup>

Sir Walter Campbell's term at Government House ended much as it had begun seven years earlier — with a 19 gun salute and a trumpet fanfare. On 29 July 1992, the Governor took the royal salute from the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade Administrative Support Group before inspecting the honour guard and saying his farewells to Government House staff — including footmen, chefs, gardeners, housemaids and maintenance people — who had lined up on the lawns to watch his departure.

Head butler David Henderson summed up: "We wish him all the best. He was excellent to work for — a real gentleman with a great sense of humour."<sup>74</sup> Sir Walter made no lengthy official speech, a choice which lent dignity to the occasion, and allowed the limelight to flow quietly on to his successor. Canadian-born Mrs Forde — Zonta president, widow of Frank Forde (son of an Australian Labor Prime Minister), and wife of former New South Wales police superintendent Angus MacDonald — was sworn in later that day by Chief Justice John Macrossan. Walter and Georgina Campbell had already been whisked by Rolls Royce to Brisbane Airport and were winging their way to a short holiday at the Ponderosa Apartments on Norfolk Island. It was time to put their feet up.

### **Postscript**

After they vacated Government House, the Campbells retired to the Brisbane suburb of Ascot. Sir Walter passed away in his home on 4 September 2004, after a short illness. Over his 83 years he had lived a varied life of rare distinction.

An obituary in *The Telegraph* praised Walter Campbell's consummate performance as Queensland Governor: "Campbell might have been born to the task. He had strength of character, shrewdness and learning; he practised diplomacy and tact, and had a cheerful nature."

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> 'State salutes real gentleman', Courier Mail (Brisbane), 30 July 1992.